

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Coláiste Cholmáin
Claremorris, County Mayo
Roll number: 64610N**

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Whole School Evaluation report

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WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Coláiste Cholmáin. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal and deputy principal, the teachers, the school's board of management, and representatives of the parents' association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and interacted with the class

teachers. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Cholmáin is situated one mile from the town of Claremorris on a site of over twenty acres on the old Knock road. It not only caters for the town of Claremorris but also for a wide rural hinterland that includes Ballindine, Irishtown, Barnacarroll, Meelickmore, Mayo Abbey and Knock.

The Archdiocese of Tuam established Coláiste Cholmáin in 1945 as an all boys' diocesan secondary school. It is the only school for boys in its catchment area since the closure of the Vocational School in 1986. Coláiste Cholmáin has grown and developed to try and fulfil the changing needs and interests of its students over the years. It has engaged in school development planning, introduced new subjects and programmes into the curriculum, has a strong tradition in sport and other extra curricular activities, has expanded the school building, fundraised to develop a multimedia room to enhance teaching and learning and put in place structures to support all students.

Enrolment in recent years has declined steadily and it was outlined during the evaluation that this trend is set to continue in the short-term. Due to falling enrolment numbers the board of management and school staff are concerned that they may not be able to continue to offer their full curriculum. It was outlined by the board that this is one of the reasons why the trustee of the school has agreed with the trustees of the all girls' secondary school to pursue the process of amalgamation. Recently the school has seen a significant increase in the number of international students attending the school. The presence of such diversity in its student population presents challenges for the school and the staff and management of the school are in the process of developing strategies to assist further in the integration and inclusion of these students.

2. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The Catholic ethos of the school is reflected in its mission statement where it aims to be a "Christian community" that "nurtures each and every student" and aims to develop "the whole person within a caring and respectful school". The Catholic ethos is also clearly evident in the school plan where its stated aim is "to develop the whole person, spiritually, academically, practically, physically, socially and culturally." While most policies do not detail specific aims and objectives, all adopted and ratified school policies are in line with the Catholic ethos. The school has also developed a Religious Education and Faith Formation Policy.

It was outlined in the meeting with the board that the trustee liaises with the board through the chairperson and they meet informally to discuss issues that may arise. It is through these meetings that the trustee has ensured the continuation and raised awareness of the founding intention and Catholic ethos in the school. From a review of the school plan the heading "*Vision statement from Trustee*" has not been completed, it is recommended that the trustee should provide such a statement so as to provide guidance and direction to the board of management, in-school management, school staff, parents and students.

The Catholic ethos is lived out in the day-to-day interactions among staff and between staff and students. It was evident that a strong sense of collegiality and respect exists among staff. From discussions with teachers it was evident that they have a strong sense of care for students and they wish to provide an environment in which each student can achieve their full potential be that academically, through sport, culturally or personally. An atmosphere of mutual respect and caring was also evident between teachers and students in classes visited in the course of the evaluation. The very good rapport between teachers and students was also expressed by the student council as being

one of the things they liked most about the school. The strong sense of care and respect for students by staff in the school is enhanced by the strong tradition of sporting and other extra curricular activities in the school. Such commitment by staff to these activities is of huge benefit to students and this was clearly expressed by the board, parents and students.

The schools Catholic ethos is celebrated at regular Masses and liturgical celebrations throughout the year, in addition students engage in formal instruction and formation in the Catholic faith. Retreats are held for all year groups and the school chaplain visits the school on a regular basis, students also engage in a number of social projects including raising funds for a variety of charities and they participate in a number of personal development programmes.

2.2 School ownership and management

The school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam. The board of management is properly constituted and meets regularly. Meetings are well attended and the proceedings are minuted and communicated to all members. The current board was established in October 2006 and the majority of members have availed of training. Through this training board members have been made aware of their role, function, responsibilities and statutory obligations. The board sees its main role as ensuring the school is run in accordance with the Catholic ethos and to ensure that the best quality education is provided for all students. The board in consultation and co-operation with the school staff, parents and students has identified a range of short-term developmental priorities for the past three academic years. These are detailed in the school plan. It was outlined at the board meeting that while they did not have any long-term vision for the future outside of amalgamation they aimed to provide as good an education as possible for the current cohort of students and focus on the short-term priorities identified in the school plan. There is a need however to ensure that the short-term plans of the board and staff correspond with the long-term plans of the trustee. In this regard it is suggested that there should be consultation between the board, in-school management and staff and the trustee to ensure coherence between the short and long-term plans for the future of the school.

The school plan is available on the school computer system to all staff. It is suggested that the school plan should also be made available to all board members and to the parents' association in particular the development priorities identified for each year. The board has adopted legally required policies on admission, strategy to encourage attendance and participation, behaviour, child protection, guidance, special education, and safety. The board directly and through delegation to the principal and staff ensures that policies are implemented, and have an effective system of review.

Decision-making procedures at board level are open, clear, shared and taken in the best interests of the school community and with regard to the ethos of the school. The board communicates with the wider school community through its agreed report. The principal as secretary to the board communicates with staff through the staff newsletter and with parents through the parents association and regular newsletters.

The parents' association has been established in the school for many years. It was originally based on bus routes but following a lapse of the association for one year in 2002 it was re-established with representatives for each year group. The parents' association sees its main role as one of support for parents and students in bringing issues to the attention of the school management. Issues reported by the parents' association are the attendance by the principal for the duration of all meetings, the condition of the school building and the condition of the entrance and car park of the school. The parents' association has approached the school management in relation to the entrance and driveway of the school and it is now included in the short-term development plans of the school. It also intends to consult with the principal with a view to inviting him to a portion of each meeting or every other meeting.

2.3 In-school management

The principal and deputy principal have developed an effective partnership approach to school leadership. Decisions taken by the school principal and deputy principal are based on consultation with appropriate members of the school community. Their leadership style is characterised by effective communication with staff and students and strong support for both staff and student achievements as evidenced by the recent introduction of a staff newsletter and school magazine. The

leadership provided by the school principal has led to a strong sense of empowerment among all staff, it was acknowledged throughout the course of the evaluation that staff felt they could approach the principal with ideas and suggestions they might have for the further development of the school. Recent initiatives in the school that have been developed under the leadership of the school principal include the introduction of Art, Music and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme into the school curriculum to meet the educational needs and interests of students and the development of a multimedia room and a comprehensive information technology (IT) infrastructure throughout the school.

In providing educational leadership to teachers the senior management team encourages and facilitates teachers in attending appropriate professional development, supports and advises teachers on a regular basis, shares best practice, guides teachers in subject department planning and encourages teachers to review their own practice at the end of each year.

While the senior in-school management team has not developed formal procedures to ensure that responsibilities delegated to post-holders and other school staff is carried out effectively and efficiently, the principal meets with post-holders and school staff on a regular basis. It is recommended that this should be done in a more systematic way.

Clearly defined duties are assigned to post-holders in accordance with agreed procedures. Duties assigned to post-holders are reviewed when vacancies arise. In addition to the assigned duties being carried out by post-holders some post-holders carry out additional duties such as the co-ordination of the Leaving Certified Applied programme. There was also evidence of formal and informal support from teachers in the management of the school and for a wide range of school activities. From discussion with all levels of school management it was evident that they felt the schedule of posts is currently meeting the needs of the school and good use is made of the experience and expertise of the personnel involved. From discussions with both middle management grades and from a review of the assigned duties attached to each post it is recommended that the balance of work required of each middle management grade and each individual post be reviewed. It is suggested that this should occur in consultation with all teachers.

The admissions policy of Coláiste Cholmáin as approved by the board and administered by the principal, details clearly the procedures in relation to admission of a student. The admission policy is fair and in compliance with relevant legislation, it is suggested however that the board should detail the extent to which an applicant's disciplinary record is taken into account in deciding admission.

The schools code of behavior and discipline must be signed by each student upon entry to the school and promotes a positive approach to the question of behaviour in the school. It exists in parallel to systems of pastoral care and support in the school. The policy on year-head duties and sanctions and the regular meeting of year-heads with the year-head coordinator ensure that the code of behaviour is implemented in a fair and consistent manner.

School management and staff involve students in the management and operation of the school through the student council and prefect system. The student council meets with the senior in-school management team on a regular basis. The student council has played a significant role in major events in the life of the school, for example, the chairperson of the student council addressed the Minister for Education and Science, invited guests, staff and students at the launch of the multi-media room. Student achievement is affirmed throughout the school year in a staff newsletter, in the newsletters sent to parents and at the end-of-year student awards ceremony. The monitoring of student attendance and retention has been enhanced by the IT infrastructure in the school. Teachers can now email the morning and afternoon rolls to the school office. In addition the school has developed an attendance policy and procedures to encourage and promote good attendance.

Parents are actively engaged in the school through the parents' association and are in regular contact with the school. Parents are supported in communicating with the school and more specifically with teachers through the student journal, which acts as a two-way communication tool between school and home. The school also issues newsletters on a regular basis and an annual school magazine. Such strategies are effective in communicating with parents on an ongoing basis. Formal parent teacher meetings are organised in line with agreed procedures. The school also facilitates the provision of information on individual student progress to parents where required.

There are effective links between the school, appropriate outside agencies and the community that enhance the quality of school life. These include the involvement of school staff with local youth, sporting and pastoral organisations. There are close links between the school and local sporting organisations that make their facilities available to the school. There are also close links between the school and the local business community who facilitate students on work experience. Local businesses have also made financial contributions to the school for such initiatives as the multimedia project.

There is ongoing liaison with outside agencies and other educational institutions to support particular programmes and to facilitate students' needs in areas such as pastoral care and special educational needs.

2.4 Management of resources

The deployment of teaching staff is consistent with teachers' qualifications, expertise and experience. Students have continuity in each subject in junior and senior cycle as they have the same teacher throughout each cycle. The manner in which teachers are deployed to specific programmes such as TY and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is fair and equitable and takes account of the professional needs of teachers in the context of meeting students' needs as all teachers are given the opportunity to teach a range of levels, cycles and programmes. The school management analyses the current and future needs of the school, on an ongoing basis, so as to ensure the school can provide appropriately for students' needs, this is particularly evident in the staffing arrangements and timetabling for LCA. The school management is concerned about the long-term viability of offering the wide range of subjects at junior cycle and is working towards ensuring that subjects such as Music and Art are maintained as part of the school curriculum.

A proportion of additional teaching resources is being used for purposes other than those for which they were allocated. The school is currently not using its full guidance allocation; the guidance counsellor is timetabled for 11 hours in general subject areas leaving 11 hours for guidance. The school's guidance allocation is currently 12.98 hours. It is recommended that the school management should ensure that the full allocation for guidance is used. In general the additional resources for special needs, learning support, traveller students and international students are being used appropriately. It is recommended however that the school should review how these resources are used for third year students in particular where there are six teachers timetabled to provide additional English lessons to the two class groups of students with exemptions from Gaeilge.

There are significant issues in relation to the quality of the accommodation in the school. The school management is aware of these issues and is actively pursuing the provision of appropriate accommodation in areas such as Art and Building Construction and the refurbishment and maintenance of windows and doors throughout the school. It is clearly outlined in the school development plan how the school management intends to address these issues. However, it is recommended that the short-term infrastructural development plans of the board should complement the wish of the trustee to amalgamate with the local all girls' secondary school to ensure that the efforts of the board and school staff are focused on the most appropriate areas. There are large assembly areas in the school and students move easily and in an orderly manner at times of transition during the school day. There are no issues in relation to the management and movement of students in the school buildings. However, the large number of school and sports bags on floors throughout the school is a health and safety hazard. It is recommended that the school management should designate and cordon off specific areas throughout the school for bags. It is suggested that student artwork or project work should be put on display throughout the school to enhance the visual environment of the school corridors and assembly areas. The board, school management and staff, parents and students have identified the risk to students travelling by foot and bike on the school avenue and are actively working towards addressing this issue.

The school accommodation is maintained to a very good standard and the school maintenance staff is to be commended in this regard. There is an active green school committee in the school and the students are encouraged to recycle their rubbish and are provided with appropriate facilities to do this.

While not all subject departments receive an annual budget all departments are asked to draw up a list of resources they require each year. The school management tries to ensure that each department receives everything it needs. The school has raised a significant amount of money through local fundraising and has invested this money in the area of IT. All teachers have a computer in their room and there are data projectors in a number of rooms throughout the school. There are also a number of mobile data projectors. It is intended in the next few years to have a data projector in each room. This money was also used to equip a multimedia PC room and to refurbish the Mac computer room. The IT infrastructure in the school has benefited both management and staff significantly in the day-to-day life of the school. It is particularly effective in helping teachers and the school management in communicating with each other and in the sharing of all relevant school documentation such as school planning documents, special educational needs resources, subject department plans and teaching resources.

Specialist rooms are consistently used for their designated purpose, are well resourced in terms of equipment and teaching resources and are well maintained. Due to the number of available science laboratories the teachers of science have converted a general-purpose classroom to be used for some science lessons. The Art room is also a converted storeroom at the back of the gymnasium. The school management and staff are to be commended for endeavouring to provide suitable accommodation for all specialist activities.

From discussions with the support staff and with school management it is evident that they are efficiently managed and are enabled and encouraged to make an appropriate and effective contribution to the life of the school.

The school safety statement is one of the priority areas identified by the school planning committee as an area for development. It is intended to revise the school safety statement during the current academic year. It is recommended that the school planning committee should consult the Department of Education and Science report, "A review of Occupational Health and Safety in the Technologies in Post-Primary Schools", which offers advice on the structures that schools should adopt in managing occupational health and safety.

3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

The school planning process in Coláiste Cholmáin is systematic and ongoing and the formal structures in place are operating effectively to support the planning process. There is a school planning committee that meets on a regular basis to co-ordinate the planning process. A number of sub-committees have been established and a number of individuals have volunteered to look at specific areas and to formulate policies based on existing practice and emerging areas.

The school planning process in Coláiste Cholmáin involves appropriate collaboration among the school partners. Parents and students are consulted on those policies that directly affect them and over the last number of years they have also had an input into the development plan for each school year. Most notably parents and students have raised the issues of the toilet blocks and the condition of the avenue and school entrance. Each new policy or revised policy is sent to each teacher for comment through the email system in the school. It is also intended to include all board members in future mailings. If any major issues arise in relation to specific policies these are discussed at staff and board meetings.

The school planning committee through its regular meetings, the school management and staff in carrying out their duties, parents and students through day-to-day interactions ensure that the different elements of the school plan are being implemented and continuously monitored. The planning committee has also set review dates for each policy and should issues arise in the interim policies will be reviewed immediately. There is a policy detailing the procedures for review and dissemination of the school plan.

The school plan has been developed and adopted by the board of management. A number of policies included in the school plan are currently in draft format and it is suggested these should be in a separate section of the plan. The permanent section of the plan clearly states the mission and ethos of the school and outlines the role each of the partners has in achieving this role.

The school plan contains comprehensive policy statements that are generally in line with statutory requirements, Department of Education and Science circulars or other guidelines on best practice. In this regard the school planning committee is currently reviewing policy statements in the area of Drugs and Alcohol, Guidance and Health and Safety.

Clear short-term school development plans have been identified for each year for the past three years that outline specific targets and methods for achieving them. These have focused on such areas as pastoral care, internal and external communication, school accommodation: structural and health and safety, cultural activities, IT and curriculum provision. It is recommended that the policies identified by staff and the planning committee should also be included in this section of the plan. From discussions held during the course of the week and from review of documentation it is clear that there is also a need to focus on such areas as support for teachers in teaching and learning for international students and in teaching and learning for special needs students in mainstream classrooms. While it is acknowledged that some work has begun in this area there is a need to set it as a short-term school planning objective. It is also recommended that the school management and staff should give priority to the core activity of the school; teaching and learning in the classroom, in future school development planning.

The school plan contains a section on long-term planning (5-10 years). This section is a summary and progress to date on the issue of amalgamation. It was outlined at the board meeting that while this was a major issue for the future of the school their focus was on the present and ensuring that the current cohort of students could achieve to their full potential. While commending and acknowledging the importance of this focus it is recommended that the board in consultation with in-school management, staff, trustee, parents and students should develop long-term development plans for the future to further enhance the quality of provision of education in Coláiste Cholmáin. Given the significant investment in IT, it is suggested that a long-term vision for the future should be developed in this area.

Evidence was provided to confirm that the board of management and staff have taken appropriate steps to develop policies in line with the provisions in *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health and Children, 1999, updated issue May 2004) and *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Evidence was also provided to confirm that the board of management has adopted and implemented the policies. A designated liaison person has been appointed in line with the requirements of the Departmental guidelines.

4. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

4.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Curriculum review has taken place on a number of occasions over recent years in Coláiste Cholmáin. The curriculum that is currently on offer in the school has been developed through consultation among school staff, parents, teachers and the board. The LCA programme was introduced two years ago to meet the needs of the cohort of students who were leaving school early and/or whose needs the Established Leaving Certificate (ELC) was not meeting. At the end of each year TY students and parents are asked to evaluate the programme and to suggest how it might be enhanced. The junior cycle curriculum was expanded in recent years through the inclusion of Art and Music. Music was introduced as management and staff felt that there was significant interest in the subject as a number of students were studying it outside of school. It is recommended that the school management should explore which other subjects students are studying outside of school that are currently not offered to students in Coláiste Cholmáin. The introduction of the LCA programme stemmed from a need identified by both management and staff. While there has not been a formal review of the school's curriculum it has arisen on a formal basis during staff meetings and planning days. In the past some short-term planning objectives have been identified in the school plan such as the possibility of providing classes in the native language of international students for examination. It was also outlined during the course of the evaluation that subject options teachers are discussing the duration of the

taster programme in first year. As students are aware from the beginning of first year that they will not be continuing with all of their subjects there is a likelihood that as the year progresses they will become less involved in those subjects which they are going to drop. In this regard, it is recommended that the school management and staff should ascertain what impact the shortening of the taster programme would have on the subject choices of students.

Coláiste Cholmáin has a broad and balanced curriculum and students can select from a wide variety of subjects and programmes. The school has worked towards developing a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all pupils. All students have access to the full curriculum. The school does provide extra English classes for those students who do not wish to study a modern European language but it was outlined by the school management that students and parents are advised of the implications of this should they choose to attend certain universities in the future. Some students are also on a reduced timetable and the school is managing this at the moment to fully integrate such students back into school.

The school complies with programme requirements in its delivery of TY and LCA. However it is below the recommended timetabling provision of three and two class periods per week in fifth and sixth years respectively for LCVP. It is recommended that this shortfall in tuition time should be addressed in the timetable for the next academic year. The school provides weekly instructional hours in compliance with DES circular M29/95.

In drawing up the school timetable the primary consideration is meeting the needs and choices of students. The school timetable allocates time for each subject as appropriate, and in general distributes the allocated time suitably. While the taster programme impacts on the number of class periods for each optional subject in junior cycle, this is offset by the fact that students are more focused and have chosen subjects they have a particular interest in. The recommended timetable provision for CSPE in second and third year is one class period per week and students in Coláiste Cholmáin have two class periods per week. It is suggested that some of the shortfall in class contact time for the optional subjects could be made up using this extra class period in second and third year.

4.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

The subject option bands in junior and senior cycle are based on preferences expressed by students. This is to be commended as best practice. In identifying the subjects and programmes they wish to study students receive a very good level of support and guidance. The taster programme in first year and TY ensure that students make well-informed decisions regarding optional subjects. Parents are also well informed regarding subject options and available programmes. There is a comprehensive prospectus for junior cycle and for TY. Students and parents are also invited to presentations on each of the senior cycle programmes available in the school; LCA, TY, LCVP and ELC. The career guidance teacher, school management and staff all offer support and advice to students in helping them to make the correct programme and subject choice and level. The school management and staff have also developed a policy to facilitate students in making a change of subject choice and level where it is feasible and reasonable.

Junior cycle Maths, English and Gaeilge are timetabled concurrently to allow for setting and student movement. In all other subjects students are divided alphabetically to allow for mixed ability teaching. In senior cycle the core subjects of Maths, English and Gaeilge are also timetabled concurrently. There are mixed ability classes for all optional subjects. All senior cycle students follow the LCVP in fifth year and those who do not qualify drop it for sixth year. The school management and staff feel that every student can benefit from the skills developed in the LCVP link modules. This is to be highly commended.

The TY programme offers an excellent educational experience for the students and deals appropriately with the overall aims of the programme. The overall aim of the schools TY programme "to promote the personal, social, spiritual, cultural educational and vocational development of pupils and prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative members of society" is in keeping with the school mission statement and ethos. The significant numbers of students taking the programme points to the success and strength of the programme in the school.

The LCA programme has been designed "to nurture each and every student to achieve maximum potential" and "recognises the talents of all students and is responsive to aptitudes, abilities, needs

and interests". A significant amount of planning and preparation has been undertaken to ensure that the LCA programme meets the current and future needs of students in preparing them for the world of work and/or further education.

4.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

The school has a wide variety of co-curricular and extra curricular activities that support and enhance the curriculum in the school. These include personal, cultural, aesthetic, community, social and sporting activities.

All students are encouraged to participate in activities and staff members give freely of their time to support such activities. Every student who turns out for any sport or activity is seen as being an essential member of that team. The list of some activities available in the school includes Gaelic football, swimming, volleyball, water polo, track and field, badminton, handball, Gael Linn debates, cabarets, quizzes, pioneer society, tours, participation in Euroscola and the European Youth Parliament, Green schools committee, Gaisce awards, educational tours and retreats. Prefects also supervise and organise lunchtime board games.

It was expressed by both students and parents during the course of the evaluation that they are appreciative of the work done by the school management and staff in relation to co-curricular and extra-curricular provision. The school has developed close links with local sporting and community organisations and regularly uses their facilities for sports and musical cabarets.

The school has had notable success in a number of sports most particularly in Gaelic football and swimming and has been very successful in Gael Linn debating competitions and is one of the leading schools involved in the European Youth Parliament educational project.

The school promotes and celebrates achievement by students in many aspects of school life. This is done in the local newspapers, yearbooks, newsletters and on notice boards around the school. In addition an annual prize-giving ceremony is held, where a student of the year for each year group is identified who has shown a dedication to study, exemplary behaviour and has been punctual and co-operative throughout the year. Awards are also given to prefects and members of the student council and students who have assisted in such activities as the running of the school shop and the school magazine. Awards are also presented for sporting, academic and artistic achievement.

5. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

5.1 Planning and preparation

Subject department planning is well established in Coláiste Cholmáin. Formal planning meetings are held on a number of occasions throughout the year. This work is further supported by regular informal contact to discuss issues pertinent to subjects. There is an appointed co-ordinator for each subject and this role is assigned on a rotational basis. This practice is commended as it enables all members to acquire the skills attached to the position and fosters collective responsibility for the work of the department.

A strong spirit of collaboration and teamwork is evident among the teaching staff. All of the departments evaluated produced comprehensive planning documentation for their respective subjects. It is recommended that future planning give increased consideration to the development of differentiated methodologies to meet the learning needs of all students within all class settings. Some departments had compiled shared folders of resources on the computer network. Communication between department members and transmission of resources is facilitated by the internal e-mail system.

5.2 Teaching and learning

There was clear evidence of effective individual planning for the lessons observed. A range of methodologies was well employed to deliver course content and all requisite materials were readily available.

The teaching methodologies used in the lessons evaluated in the course of the inspection were varied and were generally appropriate to the needs and abilities of the students observed. Students were encouraged to think for themselves through questioning and were presented with opportunities for independent learning. By linking 'real world' and familiar experiences to syllabus-related topics, students were enabled to actively participate in class discussion. It was apparent from their questions and answers that meaningful learning was taking place. It is commendable that teachers employ effective questioning strategies as this is constructive in aiding students to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Classroom management was very good and was characterised by a positive working atmosphere. The warm rapport between students and their teachers was characterised by mutual respect and co-operation. Where discussion with students was observed, best practice was noted where students' contributions were well-managed to ensure relevance to the lesson topic. Where practical work was observed, it was well organised and performed safely. Teacher-led exposition and explanation were clear and well paced. Students asked questions when they required clarification and teachers dealt with these questions in an affirmative manner.

A wide range of teaching resources was used effectively. Resource materials prepared were appropriate and effective in supporting students' learning. In addition to the whiteboard and various prepared worksheets, ICT was used effectively and innovatively integrated into a number of lessons. The use of PowerPoint presentations enhanced lessons, in that it enabled the demonstration of content that would not be possible using only a whiteboard. The fact that students may also access selected files on the school's computer network means that they may, potentially, review presentations used during lessons. This facility supports student autonomy, as they may use the presentations to aid revision and to supplement any notes taken during lessons. This is commendable. Given the fact that there is such excellent provision for ICT, it is recommended that ICT integration be encouraged in all subjects, where appropriate.

Generally, in the lessons observed, students were active rather than passive learners, taking part in class discussions and activities in a willing and engaged manner. In some subjects, group work was used to reinforce material taught. Students were engaged in the assigned work and worked well in their groups. This enabled students to learn from their peers and it provided a valuable opportunity for students to develop team-working skills. It is suggested that a useful way of further encouraging team work and of aiding learning is to assign each group the task of evaluating the work of another group.

In the main, there was good evidence for a visually-stimulating learning environment for students. However, student involvement in the creation of charts and posters for display, such as word banks, key word lists and diagrams should be encouraged. The creation of these resources would support the work done by teachers, facilitate student accessibility and provide further learning opportunities for students.

Students had a good level of knowledge and understanding relative to their abilities. They participated in classroom activities with interest and were well able to discuss concepts. It was clear that learning was taking place in a positive and relaxed environment.

5.3 Assessment

A range of assessment modes, both formative and summative, is used effectively to monitor student progress. On-going informal assessment observed during the evaluations included, oral questioning both global and targeted, homework assignments, group work, individual work and continuous monitoring of students' practical and project work. Developing strategies that assess both theory and practical activities and the four language skills mirrors the assessment objectives of the syllabuses and is encouraged as an accurate indicator of overall ability.

The school has formulated a comprehensive policy on homework to guide and support management, staff, students and parents. This policy outlines appropriate time allocations for homework tasks at junior and senior cycles. An integral part of the policy is the use of a journal system to record homework and to act as a channel of communication with parents or guardians. In the event of homework not being completed the journal must be signed by a parent or guardian and a minor sanction of extra homework is applied. Homework journals are monitored and checked on a regular

basis. The school is commended for placing such high priority on homework as it plays a vital role in consolidating student learning and thus maximising their performance potential.

A review of students' copybooks revealed that in general a good build up of work on a variety of topics was completed. Annotations in the copybooks viewed showed that teachers periodically monitor students' copybooks and that they provide affirmative comments and useful feedback to students on how to improve their work. This good practice of providing formative feedback which indicates shortcomings in written work and outlines ways to improve is essential for students to advance the quality of their work. It is recommended that its use be extended to all classes. It would also be beneficial, that such good principles of assessment for learning be further explored by developing other strategies for formative assessment as advocated by National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at <http://www.afl.ncca.ie/>.

Students are assessed regularly using a mixture of class-based assessments and year-group assessments. The results of these assessments are sent home periodically. These practices are appropriate.

Parents are very well informed and updated on student progress through a variety of mechanisms including the journal system. The results of all assessments are reported to parents through written school reports which are issued three times a year. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held for each year group. A parent can meet a teacher by appointment at any stage during the school year to discuss their child's progress. This level of home-school communication is commended and acknowledged as an additional factor in motivating students.

6. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

6.1 Students with special educational needs

The school's policy on admissions clearly states that it will not discriminate on any of the nine grounds as set out in the Equal Status Act 2000. However, the admissions policy procedures state that should relevant information and reports not be made available to the school to make an accurate assessment of the applicant's needs the school may decline to accept the applicant into the school. It is recommended that the board of management should review this procedure to detail in what instances it "*may decline to accept the applicant*". The school has also developed a Special Needs Policy that covers international students, travellers and students who are at risk. The rationale of the policy focuses on assessment and resource requirements, it is suggested that an additional reason for the policy should be to enable the school to provide an appropriate education for such students. In this regard it is recommended that matching the rationale of the policy to the success criteria would further enhance the policy. It is further recommended that the role of management and all staff in the school should be clearly defined in the school policy.

All students identified as having special educational needs (SEN) are encouraged and facilitated to participate fully in the life of the school. They have access to the full curriculum and engage in sporting and other extra-curricular activities.

The school has very good procedures in relation to the identification of students with SEN. There are good links with the feeder primary schools and there is a detailed enrolment form that requests and provides for detailed information on students with SEN. The SEN co-ordinator meets with parents where any concerns are identified prior to enrolment. The SEN team carries out screening tests and diagnostics test should they be required after enrolment. Subject teachers also pass on any observations or concerns they have to the SEN team on a regular basis.

The school has accessed the resources to which it is entitled and these resources are used specifically to provide for the educational requirements of students with special educational needs and those requiring learning support. While there is no specific learning support room, the library and one of the computer rooms are used as the main classrooms for learning support. A number of ICT resources are used to enhance literacy support and the SEN team and coordinator are continually developing their bank of resources.

The SEN team is effectively led by the SEN co-ordinator and the three main SEN teachers meet on a regular basis to plan for the provision of SEN in the school. They have recently begun the process of developing individual educational plans for students and have consulted with relevant personnel in this regard. Nine teachers are involved in SEN and learning support provision in the school. Four of these teachers are timetabled for one class period with different class groups for extra English lessons; these class groups also have other teachers for extra English lessons throughout the week. It is recommended that the same teacher should be timetabled for each class group as this provides a greater level of continuity and consistency for such students. The main method of support provided is through the establishment of special class groups when English, Irish and Maths are timetabled. Individual withdrawal is also provided should it be required. It is suggested that other strategies such as team teaching should be explored.

The school management has also contacted the Special Education Support Service (SESS) to provide in-service in the area of whole school support for SEN. The SEN team uses the IT infrastructure in the school to keep general subject teachers informed of best practice in relation to whole school provision of SEN and learning support. There is a dedicated resource folder on the staff server with advice and guidance on such issues as dyslexia and strategies for supporting such students in the classroom. It is suggested that the learning support team should have a regular input at all staff meetings highlighting best practice and strategies for SEN and learning support in the classroom. In addition it is suggested that the school should develop strategies to share the excellent practice observed in the science department in relation to support for students with SEN.

The school liaises regularly with parents to keep them informed with the progress of their sons and in the past have involved parents in supporting their sons in the school through a paired reading programme. The school liaises with appropriate external agencies, other schools and education centres in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs.

6.2 Other supports for students: (Disadvantaged, minority and other groups)

The number of international students in Coláiste Cholmáin has increased significantly in recent years. The school currently has an allocation of .45 (WTE) for international students and uses this resource appropriately for this cohort of students to provide extra English lessons. The school also a number of members of the travelling community and uses the resources available to the school appropriately to provide support for these students.

It was outlined by a number of staff members throughout the week that one of the greatest challenges facing the school is in integrating and including international students in school life. There are also challenges in supporting these students in all classes due to their significant language difficulties. In this regard the SEN team has made contact with other schools in the region that are experiencing the same challenges and with the local education centre with a view to sharing best practice and better informing themselves on appropriate strategies to support such students in the school. The SEN co-ordinator is also exploring the possibility of integrating elements of the Integrate Ireland Programme into the provision of supports for International students in the school.

There are a number systems and structures in place to help identify students who are disadvantaged and to support their effective participation in the school. Such supports include discrete financial support for school activities and programmes and Gaeltacht scholarships.

6.3 Guidance

There are four timetabled classes for Guidance, one with each of the TY classes and one each with LCA Year 1 and Year 2. The guidance counsellor works closely with the Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) co-ordinator and has taught SPHE. This co-operation is commended, as it ensures that where there is an overlap between aspects of the SPHE and Guidance programmes and that they are delivered in a co-ordinated manner. By delivering the linked aspects of the Guidance and SPHE curricula, the guidance counsellor can meet junior cycle students in a class context and start the process of assisting them in developing the skills required to make personal, educational and career choices later in their lives. It also provides an opportunity for the guidance counsellor to identify early those students who may require individual counselling.

The school has excellent information communications technology (ICT) facilities and students have access to these for guidance purposes. There is a careers library and two display boards for guidance related notices, one in the main hall and the other outside the guidance counsellor's office.

The school has a Guidance policy and has started to develop a full plan. A planning team has been established which is co-ordinated by the guidance counsellor and at the time of the evaluation two planning meetings had been held. The team intends to consult with all staff members throughout the drafting of the plan. It is recommended that parents, students (through the Student Council) and other relevant members of the school community also be consulted throughout the planning process. It is also recommended that the Department Guidance template and the documents already described be used as guides by the planning team.

A detailed report on whole-school provision, planning and preparation, learning and teaching and assessment and achievement in Guidance is included in the Subject Inspection Report on Teaching and Learning in Guidance appended to this report.

6.4 Pastoral care

The school has a documented policy and programme for pastoral care that encourages and facilitates the involvement of all members of the school community. In achieving the goals identified in the policy management, staff and students play key roles. Senior students are involved as prefects and mentors to junior cycle students. Questionnaires are distributed to each year group throughout the year to identify students that their peers have concerns about. The student council also plays a key role in pastoral care and the pastoral care team hopes to consult with the council in December to get a student perspective on pastoral care in the school. The involvement of students in pastoral care is to be highly commended. Additional ways in which students are supported include a class tutor system, a first year induction day, liaison with the Health board, a local voluntary family support service and with the National Educational Psychological Service psychologist for the area. All students are encouraged to participate in all aspects of school life to develop self esteem and self confidence.

Staff members in student support roles monitor the personal development and academic progress of all students in their care and communicate with other staff members and the pastoral care team as appropriate.

Codes of practice in relation to the promotion of positive student behaviour are an integral part of the school's pastoral care provision. Clear expectations are set out in the school rules for students and these are also accompanied by a rationale for each expectation.

The social, personal and health education programme (SPHE) in the school also plays a key role in pastoral care. A comprehensive school plan for SPHE has been developed and the co-ordinator and SPHE team have developed a modularised programme in consultation with the regional development officer for SPHE. The SPHE team is to be commended for developing an agreed approach to the delivery of the programme and for agreeing ground rules and class contracts for creating a classroom atmosphere of respect, sensitivity and care.

The spiritual development of students is addressed in an inclusive and comprehensive manner and in keeping with the ethos of the school. Religious Education (RE) is an integral part of the school's curriculum. The school chaplain visits the school on a regular basis.

The student council is elected by and representative of the senior cycle student body. There are no representatives on the student council of junior cycle students. Although the student council visits all class groups on a regular basis and there is a student council suggestion box, it is recommended that the student council should look at how they might involve junior cycle students in each meeting. The student council through their regular meetings with the senior in-school management have been successful in promoting the involvement of students in the affairs of the school. They have been responsible for highlighting the need to re-introduce study skills and manage the facilitation of food for students who undertake study after school. They also organise study skills workshops for students and have in the past fundraised for a number of charities.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A strong sense of collegiality and respect exists among staff.
- Teachers and school management have a strong sense of care for students and they wish to provide an environment in which each student can achieve their full potential be that academically, through sport, culturally or personally.
- There is very good and effective communication among all of the partners in education in Coláiste Cholmáin.
- There is an effective in-school senior management team that provides strong leadership to the school community.
- There are examples of very good leadership at all levels in the school, most notably in such areas as LCA co-ordination, IT, SEN and Pastoral care
- The IT infrastructure in the school has benefited both management and staff significantly in the day-to-day life of the school.
- The school planning process in Coláiste Cholmáin is systematic, ongoing, collaborative and enhancing.
- The school has worked towards developing a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all pupils.
- Subject choice is student centred and students receive a very good level of support and guidance.
- The school has a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that support and enhance the curriculum in the school.
- All of the departments evaluated produced comprehensive planning documentation for their respective subjects.
- The effective use of questioning strategies in the lessons observed helped to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- There is excellent provision for the integration of ICT into lessons.
- The school places a high priority on homework.
- The SEN team is effectively led by the SEN co-ordinator who provides advice and support to the teaching staff on a regular basis.
- There are excellent pastoral care structures in the school which involve the entire school community. Most notable is the involvement of students in pastoral care and the SPHE programme in the school.
- The school management and staff have demonstrated the capacity for self-review and evaluation. They are very aware of their strengths and have identified a number of challenges facing the school and are working together to ensure they continue to provide a high quality education for all students in Coláiste Cholmáin.

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

- The trustee should provide a vision statement for the school plan that would provide guidance and direction to the board of management, in school management, school staff, parents and students.
- There is a need to review the balance of work required of each middle management grade and each individual post.
- The school management should ensure that the full allocation for guidance is used.
- The school management and staff should ascertain what impact the shortening of the taster programme would have on the subject choices of students.
- The board of management should consult with the trustee to ensure that the short-term infrastructural development plans of the board complement the wish of the trustee to amalgamate with the local all girls' secondary school.
- The school management and staff should give priority to the core activity of the school; teaching and learning in the classroom, in future school development planning.

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.

