

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Science

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Louis Secondary School
Monaghan**

Roll number: 64820B

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**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE**

WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of St Louis Secondary School. 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, 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 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. INTRODUCTION

St Louis Secondary School is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of the Sisters of St Louis. It derives its ethos from the educational philosophy of the Sisters of St Louis. Its mission statement prefaces and influences all policy documents. The school is supported in living out the values espoused in the mission statement by the trustees. This support takes the form of, for example, training for the board of management, the appointment of a part-time chaplain and support for liturgies which mark the Church year.

Programmes currently on offer in the school are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Established Leaving Certificate. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was re-introduced in 2004 and is now also available in the school. Enrolment currently stands at 744 girls.

2. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school prides itself on offering a holistic education to all who enrol and on the inclusiveness of its enrolment policy and practices. Parents and students have high expectations of achievement in Certificate Examinations and they reported their satisfaction that the school endeavours to get the best out of students in all areas of life. Students reported that the spirit of the school is 'homely and holy'. This was most evident during the evaluation in the warm atmosphere in the school which was characterised by mutual respect.

2.2 School ownership and management

The board of management is constituted in accordance with the Articles of Management for Catholic secondary schools and the requirements of the Education Act 1998. This is the sixth board and meetings are held at least six times per year and more often as needed. They are well attended and minutes indicate that the board is very actively involved in the management of the school. Members of the board are confident that they are aware of their legislative responsibilities

and are particularly conscious of their responsibility to manage the school on behalf of the Trustees. They have received training to help them fulfil these duties, including training provided by the Trustees regarding the history and ethos of the school and by the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) for secondary schools on the operation of boards. The board submits a written report on its work and the operation of the school to the Trustees each year.

An agenda is prepared in advance of each meeting and minutes are maintained. Records examined during the evaluation indicated that issues raised at meetings can be on-going or may be brought by way of formal letter from representatives. It was noted that, whilst 'Any Other Business' is not included as an item on any agenda, board members reported that this did not constrain free discussion of any matter which concerned members. Decision-making is based on consensus by the full board, sometimes after issues are discussed and debated at length. An agreed report from the board is disseminated to staff by the two teacher representatives and the principal brings the reports to her meetings with the parents' association.

The board has identified a number of development priorities for the school and work is progressing on achieving each. For example, long term objectives include plans to extend the school and to manage the transfer of trusteeship to Le Chéile. In the shorter term, class grouping of first years is being changed, so that all first year classes will be mixed ability from September 2007 and a review of the Transition Year programme is also planned. The board is committed to staff development and reported itself as open to any request from teachers who may wish to avail of continuing training.

The board characterised its relationship with school senior management as 'a partnership'. Its members particularly commended the hard work ethic of the principal and her strong leadership.

A parents' association has been established in the school since 1984. The officers of the association are elected each year at an annual general meeting (AGM), which was reported as being poorly attended by parents. Meetings are held through the year. Parents are represented on the board of management by two parents who are also elected at the AGM. The link between the parents' association and these representatives is not very strong and there is no process established which allows them to report back to parents. It is recommended that this be addressed.

The parents' association plays a consultative role in issues relating to the student body, for example, the development of policies in relation to uniform, transport and internet usage. In addition to organizing fund-raising events, they also arrange for speakers on topics of interest to address parents at the AGM and assist in the management of students during the annual school musical. Those officers of the parents' association who met the inspectors reported a very good working relationship with the senior management team in the school and their appreciation of the principal's attendance at all the association's meetings. They spoke of good communication between home and school, exemplified in the twice annual newsletters, the regular use of the students' journals and direct telephone contact. While they reported that they are kept very well informed as school policies are developed, this usually occurs in the later stages of policy development.

2.3 In-school management

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal works effectively to ensure the efficient running of the school. Each has clearly defined responsibilities, with the principal dealing with administrative issues and communication with the Department of Education and

Science, parents and other agencies and the deputy principal focussing on the day-to-day running of the school. In addition to these duties, the deputy principal co-ordinates the LCVF. The plans in place to devolve this responsibility to a post-holder are encouraged by the inspection team.

The principal and deputy principal share the leadership function in the school, having a common vision of the future of St Louis and holding the same educational values. Communication between them is not formalised and is continuous and their strength as a team was evident during the evaluation process. Both are participating in the Misneach and Forbairt programmes provided by Leadership Development for Schools (LDS).

All post-holders undertake and complete their individual responsibilities as assigned and thus exercise responsibility for aspects of the management of the school. They are accountable through interview for their work and all submit written reports to principal. The principal holds a meeting with all post-holders annually in early September to confirm post duties and to review the schedule of posts. This is an opportunity to introduce new or to re-assign duties as is done in cases of leave, or retirement. In reality, while there are flexibilities built into the system, changes occur infrequently and most post-holders hold jobs for a long time. Major reviews of the schedule have taken place in 2000 and 2003 and another review is intended towards the end of 2006-2007. The commitment to involving the whole staff in identifying priority areas of responsibility for the revised schedule is highly commended and is indicative of the partnership approach espoused by the senior management team.

Post-holders who act as year heads effectively function as a middle management team, communicating to the principal and deputy principal matters which are raised in the staff room and ensuring that teachers of their year groups are kept informed of issues as they arise. The six year heads meet on a weekly basis with the senior management team. Discussions focus on matters relating to each year group as the school year unfolds and may relate to administration, discipline matters as well as students' pastoral care needs. It was acknowledged that year heads have received limited training for their role and it is planned that they will attend middle leaders' training for next year. Contact with the local education centre may also identify how they can be further supported.

Staff meetings are held three or four times per year to agreed agenda and minutes were made available for inspection. Minutes indicate that sometimes the teachers are divided into groups, for example, while the year heads meet their class tutors, the principal meets with non-tutors and the same issues are discussed. This has the potential of providing every staff member with an opportunity to express his or her opinion in a smaller group setting and can be a very effective mechanism for ensuring that discussions are fully inclusive. Communication between senior management and teachers is maintained in a number of ways, including daily announcements during break, notice boards in the staff room and private communications through notes in pigeon holes.

Teachers with whom the inspection team engaged indicated that senior management in the school is supportive and approachable. The principal and deputy principal present new teachers with a short induction programme which familiarizes them with the school and its policies. All teachers receive a staff handbook which includes a copy of the code of behaviour and guidelines for teachers on discipline. It also has all the forms a teacher might need to use, including copies of grievance and complaints procedures.

The relationship between students and staff reflects the school's commitment, as expressed in its mission statement, to being "a Christian community characterized by care and justice". Inspectors

noted the mutually respectful and supportive learning environment established in the school and a positive approach is taken to the management of students. Policies on behaviour and discipline have been developed and these are widely disseminated so that all members of the school community are familiar with them. The code of behaviour was revised in 2003 to include references to camera phones. It is also looked at every year to ensure that it is an effective strategy for maintaining the high standards in behaviour, attitude to learning and academic achievement which are set for students. During the evaluation, the inspection team found that these are attained by all but a very small minority of students.

Enrolment procedures are clear and unambiguous. The information pack given to prospective students and parents is comprehensive and includes copies of relevant policies. The school reported its practice of always accepting for enrolment any student who makes an application, once a place is available. Given its commitment to maintaining an open enrolment policy, it is recommended that the board looks again at the wording of that section of the policy which refers to the enrolment of students with special educational needs, so that any ambiguity about how the policy applies to such students is avoided.

2.4 Management of resources

The school shares grounds with a convent, a museum and a nursing home. Boundary lines for the school are clearly understood, though they are not always marked. However, students were reported to be aware of them and to be generally respectful in this regard. An extension project is currently at planning stage and it is envisaged that this will deliver accommodation which will enable the school to cater for an additional sixty students in the future.

St Louis Secondary School has a teacher allocation of forty-five whole-time equivalent posts. This includes the ex-quota positions of principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor, resource teacher and learning-support teacher. The school has also received additional allocations for programme provision, curricular concessions, newcomer students and special needs students. The trustees have provided for a part-time chaplain and the school also benefits from the services of a home-school-community liaison co-ordinator, shared with two other second level and three primary schools. This scheme is funded by Co Monaghan Partnership. The teacher allocation is deployed effectively to address the needs of all students.

Facilities to support the implementation of the curriculum are well organised and maintained and management makes every effort to ensure the availability of specialist rooms for the relevant class times. The condition of the buildings and the appropriateness of the learning environment are good and the team of ancillary staff responsible for their maintenance is commended for their efforts. Parents and students, while reporting that the school is “scattered” across a number of buildings, were happy with the level and quality of the facilities available. Recent refurbishment of two laboratories and the computer facilities were acknowledged as valued improvements.

The school has excellent facilities within the two computer rooms. A good information and communications technology (ICT) usage policy has been developed and parents are required to sign an acceptable use agreement on behalf of their daughters. There is good networking generally, and a minor issue was reported regarding access to the facilities for senior students at peak times during year, most particularly when applications for third level colleges are due. It is suggested that management look at this with the students’ council, or Coiste, and the guidance counsellors.

A health and safety policy is in place and one of the post holders acts as the school's safety officer. The school reported that an audit of safety issues was carried out in the recent past and that the safety officer and the principal conduct an annual review at the end of each academic year. This identifies risks which may have arisen during the year and allows these to be addressed during the summer break. As a support to the safety officer, it is recommended that specific training for that role should be sourced and availed of.

3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

The school has been involved in school development planning since 2003, when ten task groups were established to work on a set of development priorities. These priorities had been identified following a review of school needs, involving the teaching staff and the board. The planning team in the school comprises the principal, the deputy principal and a post holder who co-ordinates the work of the ten task groups. Almost all teachers are involved in some way. A school plan has been developed through their work and parents have been kept well informed of policy as it developed in the school. Students, through the student's council, or Coiste, were consulted on a small number of the documents. It is recommended that the school should collaborate with the parents' association to identify how parents' input could be canvassed at an earlier stage of policy development.

The school plan has permanent and developmental sections which address the needs of the school. Key policy documents make up the permanent section of the plan and the current development priorities, including for example the school extension and a review of the TY curriculum, introduce the developmental section. This latter section has a clear focus on outcomes, evaluation and review and it describes the work of those task groups whose development aims have already been achieved. Since their inception, task groups have developed policy in a number of areas and have gone on to implement and/or monitor those policies. In some areas task groups have also reviewed and made changes to policies as necessary. This level of involvement speaks highly of the enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers to the school but the focus on monitoring or actually implementing changes means that no-one is free to maintain the forward momentum of planning other than the small planning team which co-ordinates the work of the task groups. It is recommended that the school should review the planning structures (the task groups and the three-person planning team) to see if it is necessary to devote as much time to all tasks as has been done in the past and to assign new challenges in keeping with the current needs identified. This review should involve all the teaching staff and may provide a good opportunity for greater involvement of parents in school planning, as recommended above.

The planning team might also have another look at how the developmental section of plan is written so that it reflects the wealth of forward planning actually happening in the school. At present, the summative nature of this section means that it does not adequately reflect the work which is ongoing in the school to develop its curriculum and support structures for students, for example, subject department planning and reviews of the curriculum in first and fourth years.

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

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum to serve the needs of all students. Programmes currently on offer in the school are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) which was re-introduced in 2004. Parents reported that they were very happy with this level of provision, particularly with the availability of the LCA.

Curriculum planning and organization are a central focus of the school's planning process and are supported by the strong emphasis on the co-ordination of subject departments evident in the schedule of post duties. The value which the school attaches to this work is apparent in the willingness of the board of management to provide an allowance for the co-ordination of subjects which the schedule does not cover. Curriculum documents, including Departmental circulars, are readily available and disseminated promptly to teachers. Subject co-ordinators are expected to keep a record of department meetings and to facilitate planning for their subjects and their work is monitored annually by the principal.

The inspection team found that the elements of an effective Transition Year programme are visible in St Louis Secondary School in the balance achieved between core and modular subjects and between traditional academic and innovative TY courses. The latter are facilitated by three teachers who have put together a very stimulating modular programme and who manage the work experience elements of TY very efficiently. Although optional, up to ninety-five per cent of students complete TY; this indicates the degree of satisfaction with the programme expressed by parents and students. Planning for the academic subjects in TY is less satisfactory, however. Individual teachers are responsible for devising a distinctly 'transition' approach to their subject areas and subject inspectors found that this was not always achieved. It is recommended that the subject plans for TY should be revised, preferably by all members of each subject department working collegially. Guidance on writing these plans can be found in the brochure *Writing the Transition Year Plan*, which outlines the principles and content of a written programme. This can be downloaded from the TY support service website, www.transitionyear.ie

The Leaving Certificate Vocational and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes are managed by small teams of teachers who meet to plan their work. These meetings often take place during breaks and lunchtimes and result in well co-ordinated, successful programmes. The generosity of the teachers is an indication of their commitment to the programmes and to their students. The Link Modules on the LCVP course are taught during students' study periods. The LCA course is offered every second year in order to ensure that a class group can be formed. It is particularly well documented and good written plans were made available to the inspection team. It is suggested that all programme plans should include a review process which allows for the formal evaluation of their implementation and effectiveness in supporting students' learning. This review should involve teachers, students and parents.

The school timetable allocates time for almost all subjects as appropriate, and distributes the allocated time suitably. However, Physical Education is optional in senior cycle, while students in both fifth and sixth years have study periods on their timetables, during which no subject is being taught. It is recommended that serious consideration be given to including this subject in the core curriculum for all senior students.

4.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Students generally follow a six year programme, including the optional TY, in St Louis Secondary School. First years study all subjects available other than German, Home Economics, Art and Technology, of which they choose two. It is only at the end of first year that they make their choices for the Junior Certificate. A detailed information document is made available to students and parents in relation to course content and the level of challenge in each. Students then choose freely from among the list of available optional subjects and three option bands are created. In order to ensure that students make the correct choices for themselves, they have an opportunity to meet the guidance counsellors, both formally in guidance classes and at individual interview. Placement in subject groups is checked again in second year and changes in subject groups can be made up to mid-term.

This excellent pattern of providing comprehensive information for students and parents, determining option bands by the needs and interests of students and careful monitoring of students' satisfaction with their choices, is repeated at the end of third year and following the TY. The facility for students in TY to sample a new subject, such as Spanish or Physics/Chemistry, for the year is commendable also.

4.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

A wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, which contribute to the personal and social development of students, is promoted and encouraged in the school. This provision is heavily reliant on the generosity of the teaching staff and their interest and enthusiasm adds greatly to the learning experiences of the students in their care. The range includes debating in Irish and English and public-speaking; participation in art and design and music competitions and the production of an annual school musical in TY. In addition, a wide range of sporting activities is available to students.

Management and staff in the school actively encourage all students, including those with special educational needs or those from minority groups and/or disadvantaged backgrounds, to participate in as many extra-curricular activities as possible. The opportunities these provide for helping students settle into the school was commented on by parents, who greatly appreciated the work done by teachers.

5. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

5.1 Planning and preparation

School development planning is well established in St Louis Secondary School. Management provides time for formal meetings and this has facilitated subject departments working collaboratively to produce planned programmes for their respective subject areas. Subject co-ordinators have been appointed in each of the individual subjects evaluated and this also facilitates the planning process. These good practices are commended.

During the evaluation process written subject department plans were provided. These written plans conformed to the template provided under the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and included aims and objectives for the teaching of the subject, curricular content within

given timeframes, arrangements for the timetabling and organisation of classes and procedures for the recording and reporting on student progress. Records of subject department meetings were also made available. To progress the good work already completed it is recommended that consideration be given to developing and documenting active learning methodologies as well as requirements for supporting materials. It is also recommended that there should be a focus on learning outcomes in department plans, rather than a description of content to be covered; such an approach is can be found, for example, in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) syllabuses.

In the lessons observed there was evidence of effective short-term planning by individual teachers and in some instances individual lesson plans were provided. A variety of resources including worksheets, supplementary course material, revision plans, teacher notes and ICTs was used to extend the range of learning opportunities for students. School management and subject departments are commended for the development of these resources as they contribute to effective teaching and learning and reflect the commitment of the school community to providing rich learning experiences for its students. As part of the subject planning process, the development of procedures for the integration of ICT into teaching and learning is recommended.

5.2 Teaching and learning

In lessons observed, clear classroom routines had been established and classroom management was purposeful and effective, thus creating a supportive, affirming and mutually respectful atmosphere in which learning was taking place. All lessons were purposeful with the good practice of explicitly sharing the lesson objectives with students, orally or in writing, noted on a number of occasions. It is recommended that this good practice extend to all teachers and all lessons.

Teacher-student interactions were optimised in cases where students were encouraged to develop higher-order thinking skills through being challenged to offer explanations for their answers. There were also instances of the very good practice of guiding students through topics, questioning, monitoring and advising, and ensuring engagement with the lesson content. Students participated willingly in discussion with their teachers and were supported in seeking clarification wherever necessary.

Strategies used to actively engage students in the learning process included group work, the use of concrete stimulus materials, spot demonstrations, games, and other effectively-organised practical activities. Where methodologies varied, the learning experience was enhanced and students' enthusiasm increased. It is recommended that all teachers work towards incorporating variety in methodology and student activity in their classroom practice.

5.3 Assessment

The narrative on assessment in the reports of the subjects evaluated is predominantly positive. This relates to the modes and frequency of assessment, the quality of feedback to students, the maintenance of records and the provision of reports to parents.

Student learning is regularly assessed by way of class tests and good records of their progress are kept. However, greater attention should be paid to student achievement as an aid to planning and review purposes within departments. The quality and neatness of students' homework was noted

by the subject inspectors and teachers make use of supporting and affirming comments to encourage and recognise students' efforts. This is very good practice and the extension of the use of *assessment for learning* strategies to all subject areas is recommended.

Progress is communicated to parents/guardians through written reports sent home twice a year and through parent/teacher meetings that take place once a year for each year group with the exception of TY. In addition, the student journal facilitates two-way communication between the school and home as necessary.

6. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

6.1 Students with special educational needs

St Louis Secondary School receives an allocation of 1.45 whole time teacher equivalents (WTE) to enable it to meet the needs of students who have been assessed as having special educational needs (SEN). This is in addition to a full time learning support teacher post and an ex-quota full time teacher post for resource teaching.

The resource teaching and learning support functions are quite distinct in this school and the responsibilities of each are clear. A resource teacher works with the fourteen students with assessed SEN currently enrolled in the school and the school's commitment to delivering a best practice model of support was evident in the generation of individual education plans for all of these students. Resource teaching is delivered in a well-resourced room, equipped with ICT and up-to-date software. Curriculum planning for resource teaching was of a high quality. It includes identification of students' priority needs and learning targets and an annual plan or calendar of events. It was clear that there is very good liaison with teachers to support their efforts to tailor teaching methods and lesson content to students' needs. The resource teacher works closely with the special needs assistant allocated to the school, who is responsible for the care needs of three students with physical disability. The collegial approach taken by both to managing the needs of students is highly commendable.

The learning support teacher works with students, other than those with SEN, who have low achievement in English and Mathematics and who have not been allocated resource-teacher support by the National Council for Special Education. In St Louis Secondary School, these students generally have been assessed as having additional learning needs by an educational psychologist. There are twenty eight students on the learning support list, of whom thirteen have refused the offer of support. The learning support teacher works with students in small groups in the English room, a bright and attractive space. Allocated hours are used to offer additional support in class, particularly for Mathematics in first year.

The reliance on recommendations in psychological reports in determining who should benefit from learning support is not good practice. In the selection of students for supplementary teaching, students who are performing at or below the tenth percentile on standardised tests of literacy and mathematics should be offered support, regardless of whether a psychological assessment has been carried out. The progress made by the student receiving supplementary teaching should determine when this support is no longer needed.

Support is also available for students who have been identified in the school as gifted learners. This is funded by a past student, whose generosity has made it possible for students in TY to participate in the Centre for Talented Youth summer school. Students participating in this

programme are required to sit assessment tests administered by Dublin City University and special support classes are provided in the school for these students prior to the tests.

The resource and learning support teachers are working together on a common support policy document. This will further develop the policy, dated November 2005, which is presently included in the school plan. It covers both groups of students and includes the school's policy on supporting students who do not have English as their first language. The comprehensive nature of the draft document is admirable, as is the collaborative approach being adopted by the teachers. This allows each to bring his or her own particular strengths and knowledge to the policy as it develops.

The arrangements for support provision reflect a concern that students receiving support are fully integrated into the appropriate class groups. The resource and learning support teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring that students in St Louis Secondary School will achieve to their potential. This has been recognised by senior management and a need for a specific post of responsibility in relation to support provision has been identified. This may well be attainable as the present schedule is revised later this year. A possible focus of such a post-holder's work may well be to review how effectively the present arrangements are identifying students, other than those with psychological reports, who may be experiencing difficulties. Given the level of teaching resources for providing support available to the school, it is recommended that the learning support function should have a broader reach than students who have been assessed as having additional learning needs by an educational psychologist. The post-primary guidelines, *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs 2007*, recently published by the Department of Education and Science, should be consulted during this review.

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

The student population in the school is relatively diverse. Approximately twenty-eight percent of students are from families mainly dependent on social welfare and almost seven percent of students are newcomers who do not have English as their first language. This diversity reflects the school's enrolment policy of always accepting for enrolment any student who makes an application, once a place is available.

The quality of support provided for students from disadvantaged groups is good. There is an awareness in the school that a minority of families may struggle with school and other expenses and the principal reported that sensitivity is exercised when equipment fees and other costs, for example, for school trips, are being collected in the school. Links have been made with local organizations to access specific support with uniform and book expenses and to help those disadvantaged students who wish to pursue third level studies.

Since the school does not benefit from participation in the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) scheme, there is no Department of Education and Science funded home-school-community-liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator on staff. However, Co. Monaghan Partnership funds a HSCL co-ordinator who is shared by St Louis and two other post-primary schools with three primary schools in the town. This co-ordinator liaises with the deputy principal and the year heads in the school to provide a range of supports to students. These include a day-long induction programme for first years, designed to make them familiar and comfortable with the school and a visit in October to support the 'settling in' process. In addition, the HSCL co-ordinator visits the school to arrange a 'Bonding Day' for fifth year LCA students.

The need to plan for the provision of appropriate supports, both social and academic, for newcomer students is recognized in St Louis Secondary School. This is a relatively new cohort of students for the school and there is scope to improve the way their needs are being identified and met. At present, thirty of the fifty newcomer students enrolled require English language tuition. The school has an allocation of two WTE, or forty-four hours, for this purpose and approximately half of this is used. The teacher who works with this group provides a programme of small group and individual support in English and has been particularly generous in providing support not only to the students but to their families also. A pastoral care policy has been developed and it describes the full range of supports available to students in the school. As it is reviewed, it is recommended that it be developed to include specific reference to measures which promote the social inclusion of newcomers.

The remaining twenty two hours has been used to create a fifth class grouping for English in first year. The rationale presented for this by the school is that the ten percent of students who need English as a second language (ESL) support would be well served in smaller English class groups and that their studies in other curriculum areas would not be adversely affected by a support programme requiring withdrawal. However, it is unclear how the English teachers and the ESL teacher liaise and what brief the former have in regard to providing specific support for ESL students in their class groups. While this argument may have some merit, the allocation for ESL provision is intended for direct support of students. It is not good practice to disperse the hours across a year group, ninety percent of whom do not require ESL support. Where this is done, the school must ensure that the specific needs of ESL students are addressed in English class and that the programme taught, the teaching strategies and assessment procedures used to achieve this in English class are appropriately documented.

6.3 Guidance

The school receives an allocation of thirty hours for guidance from the Department of Education and Science and a further seven hours is funded by the school from its own resources. There is a good level of provision and whole school support for guidance. Three guidance counsellors form a dedicated and focused guidance team, which delivers a comprehensive guidance programme in the school. One guidance counsellor works exclusively with first years, having met their parents at the open evening prior to their enrolment and liaised with the HSCL co-ordinator to arrange their induction into the school. The other guidance counsellors, one of whom delivers the Career Investigation module in LCVP, provide guidance for the other year groups. The three guidance counsellors meet on a weekly basis and minutes of their meetings are maintained. The professionalism with which they approach their work was evident in these records.

A guidance plan has been developed by the guidance team over the past three years. It provides a clear overview of guidance programmes available in the school and all the teaching staff was consulted before it was finalised.

First years will all meet the guidance counsellor on a one-to-one basis during the year and she also visits classes by arrangement with teachers to discuss subject choices. Guidance classes are timetabled for fifth and sixth year students and students attend college open days. Speakers are invited to the school to answer questions on career options. The guidance counsellors also disseminate information about subject and programme choices to parents at open evenings.

There are good facilities for guidance delivery in the form of an office for the principal guidance counsellor which houses a small library and ICT facilities. The other guidance counsellors have a

smaller space available in the corner of a classroom, though they also have access to the main careers office. Student access to ICT to use online careers resources is limited to the facilities in the library, which is open only at lunchtimes. At particularly high demand times, for example when applications for third level college entry are being submitted, guidance counsellors will supervise students who wish to access the internet during study periods. It is suggested that, as resources allow, additional computers might be provided near the careers office.

There is a strong link established between the pastoral care system in the school and the guidance function, with guidance counsellors key figures in the support system available to students. This is commended as very good practice. Students who require personal counselling are supported by one of the guidance counsellors. They are referred for counselling by their teachers, the year head, parents or they may self-refer. A 'Rainbows' programme has been established in the school and the guidance counsellors are involved in the anti-bullying week and 'Cool Schools' programme. Guidance teachers are also involved in the training of the mentors, or *Cairde*, group.

6.4 Pastoral care

There are a number of elements in the pastoral care strategy in St Louis Secondary School. These, when combined, aim to ensure that the goal, stated in the school's mission statement, of students leaving with "enhanced self-confidence" can be achieved. No one person has particular responsibility for pastoral care; all teachers act in a pastoral, as well as an academic, capacity.

Each class is assigned a class tutor who is responsible for the pastoral care of students in his or her group. Tutors are generally assigned to their class group for each of the three years in junior cycle. They have a pastoral role only, passing on any issues to the relevant year head or the principal as appropriate. A programme in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) has been devised in the school and is provided for all junior cycle students. The range of modules taught is in keeping with National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) curriculum framework. This is taught by class tutors wherever possible.

The year head system is particularly effective. Posts of responsibility are assigned for this role and the six years heads meet weekly with the principal to report on progress in relation to issues of concern to groups and individuals in their year. Year heads are assigned to a group for six years, developing a strong, supportive, relationship with their students over time. They are thus well placed to identify any difficulties and deal with problems in an informed and appropriate way. There is a balance in their duties between discipline and pastoral care roles. They monitor attendance and punctuality and review students' reports, and the detention system is managed by them. Year heads also meet with class tutors at the start of the year and at staff meetings.

A third important element in the pastoral care structures is the attention given to first year students in the school. The HSCL co-ordinator facilitates an induction programme for all first years and a peer mentoring scheme, *Cairde*, has been set up on the suggestion of the students' council. Mentors meet their students once a week at break or lunch and they organise an activity afternoon as part of induction process. Mentors are, in turn, supported and trained by the guidance counsellors, one of whom acts as the liaison teacher. In addition to providing valuable support to students who are new to the school, *Cairde* is also a very valuable leadership experience for fourth year students.

Religious Education is an important element of the curriculum and, in keeping with the ethos of

the school, students are encouraged to get involved in a variety of social justice projects. The school has good access to chaplaincy services through the support of the Louis Sisters Education Office and the local diocese.

Management encourages students to take an active role in representing their peers. There is a students' council, or Coiste, directly elected by the student body from fourth and fifth years. Sixth year members are retained as 'honorary' members. Regular meetings are facilitated by a liaison teacher. This council plays an important role in the school, bringing issues to management as they arise. Its members have been involved in the on-going review of the discipline and the anti-bullying policies and in developing the new uniform. They are justly proud that it was they who proposed the mentoring programme for fourth years and first years which runs in the school.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management is constituted in accordance with the Articles of Management and the requirements of the Education Act 1998. Members of the board are confident that they are aware of their legislative responsibilities and are particularly conscious of their responsibility to manage the school on behalf of the Trustees, to whom they make an annual report.
- A parents' association has been established in the school since 1984. It plays a consultative role in issues relating to the student body. Parents are represented on the board of management by two parents who are also elected at the annual general meeting.
- The in-school management team, comprising principal, deputy principal and post-holders, works effectively to ensure that the school's mission is achieved. The principal and deputy principal share the leadership function in the school, having a common vision of the future of St Louis and holding the same educational values. Post-holders undertake and complete their individual responsibilities as assigned and agreed with senior management, and thus exercise responsibility for aspects of the management of the school. They are accountable through interview for their work and all submit written reports to principal.
- Facilities to support the implementation of the curriculum are well organised and maintained and management makes every effort to ensure the availability of specialist rooms for the relevant class times. The condition of the buildings and the appropriateness of the learning environment are good. The team of ancillary staff responsible for their maintenance is commended for its efforts.
- A school plan, comprising both permanent and developmental sections, has been developed and adopted by the board of management, although the summative nature of the developmental section means that it does not adequately reflect the work which is ongoing in the school at present to develop its curriculum and support structures for students.
- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. Comprehensive guidance and advice are provided to students and parents to assist them in choosing programmes, subjects and levels within subjects. A wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, which contribute to the personal and social development of students, is promoted and encouraged in the school.

- Subject departments work collaboratively to produce planned programmes for their respective subject areas. There was evidence of thorough planning and preparation for all lessons observed and this resulted in lessons that were purposeful, well structured and presented at a pace suited to the abilities of the students.
- Student learning is regularly assessed by way of class tests and good records of their progress are kept.
- Very good support is provided to SEN students and to other students who have been assessed as having additional learning needs by an educational psychologist. This was evident in the planning documentation prepared, the collegial approach adopted by the resource and learning support teachers and the support given by them to teachers to tailor teaching methods and lesson content to students' needs.
- The quality of support provided for students from disadvantaged groups is good and the need to plan for the provision of appropriate supports, both social and academic, for newcomer students is recognized in the school. The school has an allocation of two WTEs for this purpose and approximately half of this is used to provide a programme of small group and individual support in English.
- There is a good level of provision and whole school support for guidance. Three guidance counsellors form a dedicated and focused guidance team, which delivers a comprehensive guidance programme in the school. A guidance plan has been developed.
- There is a very effective year head and class tutor system in place. This is supported by the *Cairde* mentors, so that the pastoral care needs of students can be identified and met in the school.

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

- The school should collaborate with the parents' association to identify how parents' input could be canvassed at an earlier stage of school policy development
- The school should review its planning structures so as to assign new challenges in keeping with the current needs identified. It should also revisit the developmental section of the school plan to ensure that it reflects the wealth of forward planning actually happening in the school.
- Given the level of teaching resources for providing support available to the school, it is recommended that the learning support function should have a broader reach than students who have been assessed as having additional learning needs by an educational psychologist.
- The school must ensure that the specific needs of ESL students are addressed in English class and that the programme taught, teaching strategies and assessment procedures used to achieve this in English class are appropriately documented.
- It is recommended that all teachers work towards incorporating variety in methodology and student activity in their classroom practice.

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.

8. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- 1 Subject Inspection of Geography – 23 January 2007
- 2 Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 26 January 2007
- 3 Subject Inspection of Music – 23 January 2007
- 4 Subject Inspection of Science/Biology – 26 January 2007

Appendix

8.1 School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management, Parents' Association, Management and staff of St Louis welcomes the WSE Report for its commendation of the excellence of the school in many key areas

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 Board considers the WSE Report to be a significant resource in terms of the strategic development of the school. The findings and recommendations of the inspection will be utilised constructively in prioritising and informing future school development.

