

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

**Whole-School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Saint Vincent's CBS  
Finglas Rd, Glasnevin, Dublin 11  
Roll number: 60400F**

**Date of inspection: 11 April 2008**



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

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of St Vincent's CBS School was undertaken in April 2008. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in three subjects and in the Transition Year programme were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects and programme. (See section 7 for details). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St Vincent's school is an all-boys voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Christian Brothers since 1863. The school aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic education programme based on the religious and educational philosophy of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice. St Vincent's school is undergoing a period of transition due to the decision by the Christian Brothers to hand over responsibility for their schools to a lay group, the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). This decision provoked reflective debate among the network of Christian Brother schools to reach a consensus on the characteristics of an Edmund Rice School. Five key elements were identified; nurturing faith, promoting partnership, excelling in teaching and learning, creating a caring school community and inspiring transformational leadership. These elements form the basis of the vision espoused in the ERST charter and provides the framework for the future development of an Edmund Rice School. St Vincent's will formally be part of ERST from September 08. This marks the beginning of a new era for the school.

Due to demographic changes and the opening of new schools in nearby suburban areas the school has experienced significant changes in the size and composition of its student cohort. This has presented challenges for the school. St Vincent's has a current enrolment of 295 students who come mainly from the areas of Finglas, Glasnevin, Cabra and the north inner city. Current enrolment trends suggest that the school will experience a modest increase in enrolment figures over the next two years.

In 2006/07 the school was accepted into the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative. The school is now receiving additional resources and supports under this new integrated school support system that aims to address the needs of young people from disadvantaged communities.

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

#### **1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school**

The characteristic spirit of the school is underpinned by the religious and educational philosophy of Edmond Rice. This philosophy is reflected through the emphasis placed in the school's mission statement on providing a comprehensive and rounded education in partnership with parents. The current mission statement was agreed in 2004 following a review of a previous statement. A commendable level of consultation informed this review. A draft mission statement, prepared by a sub-committee of staff, was distributed for consultation to the staff, the board of management and a representative group of parents and students. This good practice facilitates a shared sense of ownership of the mission of

the school. It is praiseworthy that the mission statement is included in the students' journal and made available in the teacher's pack at the start of each academic year. As the ERST charter outlines a clear vision for the future development of an Edmund Rice school, consideration could be given to collaboratively reviewing the mission statement in the context of the five key elements of this charter. The revised statement should be used as the reference point in the development of a school plan and could be visibly displayed around the school building.

St Vincent's has an inclusive and Christian ethos. The school strives to meet the needs of its diverse student cohort. This is evidenced by the efforts made to broaden the range of curriculum programmes offered by the school. The small size of the school is conducive to developing a strong sense of community spirit among all members of the school community. This was recognised as a key strength of the school at a number of meetings held with the inspectors. Recent commendable initiatives by the board of management in supporting the parents' council, and in facilitating a broader representation on the students' council should serve to strengthen the community bonds in the school.

The recent establishment of a school care team, together with the work carried out by staff employed by the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, effectively support the vision and mission of the school.

## **1.2 School ownership and management**

The current board of management was appointed in 2006 and is constituted in accordance with the Articles of Management for Catholic Secondary Schools. The rich diversity of background and experience among board members are an asset to the school. The board meets regularly and demonstrates an awareness of its roles and responsibilities. Draft minutes and an agenda are circulated one week prior to each meeting of the board. This good practice facilitates effective continuity and preparation between meetings. An informed, concerned and collaborative approach is evident in the decision-making procedures adopted by the board. It is laudable that all board members have received training for their roles and that additional outside expertise is sought if required. At present, communication procedures between the board and the school community are not fully formalised. Parent and staff nominees report orally to their respective groups, though the principal may also take on this role. Contact with the trustees is maintained through the trustee nominees or the principal. In the interests of improving the effectiveness of communication between the board and all members of the school community, it is recommended that the board consider issuing an agreed report after each meeting. This would ensure that the same message is delivered to all the representatives, and that a written record of such communication can be kept on file. Procedures should also be established by the board for informing the general parent body of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.

While the board is reliant on the principal to report on matters relating to the day-to-day management of the school, it is highly commendable that the board also meets with members of the school staff such as the home-school-community liaison and the school completion programme co-ordinators. This good practice should ensure that the board takes a proactive role in the further development of these supports in the school.

The board demonstrates an awareness of its role in ensuring the on-going formation of staff through engagement with in-service training. The cost of relevant professional development courses that staff members undertake in their own time is subsidised. This practice actively facilitates teachers' continued professional development (CPD). However, whole-school policy and procedures in relation to facilitating teachers' release to attend CPD during the

school day is impacting negatively on the level of engagement with a wide range of in-service courses provided under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science. These courses are necessary to facilitate teachers' upskilling in the changes brought about by revised syllabuses and curriculum programmes, and to ensure that high quality implementation of curriculum programmes is ensured. The difficulties associated with providing appropriate in-school supervision to facilitate teachers' attendance at in-service training are acknowledged. However, the board and senior management together with the teaching staff need to address this situation in order to extend the good practices already evident and to enhance the school's ability to implement modern curriculum programmes. Teachers should be proactively encouraged to attend relevant CPD. Therefore school policies and procedures in relation to facilitating teachers' release to attend CPD during the school day should be reviewed to ensure that they facilitate proactively the release of staff to the greatest extent possible. It is recommended that the board, in association with senior management, should carry out an analysis of the training needs of individual teachers in each subject department and each curriculum programme. Procedures should then be put in place, which are within the school's capacity, to facilitate a systematic and incremental approach to the expansion of teachers' skills in each of the areas identified.

The board has adopted some of the legally required policies and has played an active role in the review and further development of some whole-school policies. It is commendable that the board reviews policies at draft stage prior to ratification. The board recognises the pressing need to re-direct its focus and become more proactively involved in long-term planning for the future development of the school. The development of a school plan has been recognised as a priority by the board. To this end, and in line with section 21 of the Education Act, it is recommended that the board make arrangements for the immediate preparation of a school plan. This is a necessary step to accomplish one of the board's key development priorities: the implementation of the ERST charter. This plan should be developed in consultation with staff, parents and students. The consultation process should lead to agreement on the present and future needs of the school. The plan should outline clearly the vision, aims and priorities for the future development of St Vincent's School. Short-term and long-term targets together with appropriate action plans should be developed to meet the agreed priorities. The targets set should form the basis of the action plan that will be developed by the school as part of its participation in DEIS. The vision underpinning the plan should reflect the five elements of the ERST charter. The support and advice of the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) may prove useful in developing the plan. Further information is available at [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie)

### **1.3 In-school management**

Both members of the senior management team were on the teaching staff prior to their appointments as principal and deputy principal, and therefore have a long-standing association with the school. The duties of the principal include liaising with the Department of Education and Science and the board of management, as well as being a member of a number of external committees that support the work of the school. The duties of the deputy principal relate to the day-to-day running of the school and managing the school's finances. The senior management team takes the lead role in decision-making and in directing school policies and procedures. During the course of the evaluation, it was evident that senior management work closely together in a mutually supportive manner and share a common understanding of the challenges facing the school. In meetings held with the board of management during the evaluation, it was obvious that board members appreciate the work of the senior management team. The principal attends the annual principals' conferences as well as the cluster meetings that are organised for the Christian Brother schools.

Some good practices are evident in supporting an effective system of communication between the senior management team and staff. At the beginning of each academic year staff members are given a teachers' pack. This includes the school's mission statement, copies of all whole-school policies and a booklet on school procedures. From reviewing this booklet it is obvious that it makes a significant contribution to increasing staff awareness of school-related issues. However, some of the content is in need of updating and amending. Therefore, it is recommended that senior management, in collaboration with the board and staff, review this booklet. This would provide an opportunity for them to discuss the effectiveness of the procedures listed. Further details such as the role of the form tutor and special-needs assistants could also be included.

It is apparent that communication procedures between the SMT and staff in relation to key decision-making need to be reviewed and strengthened. Staff meetings are scheduled three times per year and commendably all staff members are afforded an opportunity to submit items for the agenda. However, members of the teaching staff expressed some dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of these meetings. Therefore, in order to extend a common understanding of school-related issues and improve the effectiveness of communication throughout the staff, it is recommended that the format of staff meetings be reviewed. Any revision of the format should ensure that all staff members have opportunities for constructive professional dialogue and for open discussions about all school-related issues. This practice will empower staff and create a sense of shared ownership of the future development of the school. Staff can also be kept informed of day-to-day issues through informal announcements delivered at coffee break, and through the provision of dedicated notice boards in the staff room.

Middle management comprises six assistant principals, eight special-duties posts as well as the position of programmes co-ordinator. The current schedule of posts in the main was introduced five years ago and is based on a wider review that took place some years earlier. While post-holders are involved in a range of duties that support school administration, curriculum programmes and student care, there is general agreement that the current schedule of posts no longer meets the needs of the school. Some of the duties attached to posts have become obsolete, while the workload attached to others has increased significantly. To ensure the effective implementation of one of the key elements of the ERST charter, transformational leadership, it is recommended that the leadership and management model used in the school be reviewed. As a means of distributing responsibility and ownership for leading and managing whole-school issues, the potential of the middle-management structure in the school should be fully realised. It is recommended therefore that a comprehensive review of the current schedule of posts should be carried out. This review should be led by the board, in consultation with all staff, and be carried out with reference to the key objectives and priorities identified in the school plan. The revised duties should be commensurate with the level of post responsibility and should utilise individual post-holders' talents and expertise. There should be a clear job description for each post, and procedures should be put in place to monitor and review systematically the duties attached to each post. In meetings held with the inspectors, there was a commendable level of willingness evident among the post-holders to participate in such a review and introduce these practices to ensure that the scheduling of posts continues to respond effectively to the needs of the school. To support effective communication, all members of staff should be made aware of the management structure in the school and the schedule of duties assigned, perhaps through the staff information pack. SDPI can provide expert advice and practical assistance to schools in facilitating this type of a review.

At present senior management does not meet in plenary session with post-holders. In order to facilitate a teamwork dimension to the work of middle management, opportunities should be created to allow members of middle management to meet with the senior management team. In order to support the training needs of senior and middle management,

the services and initiatives organised by the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme should be availed of. Further details are on the LDS website at [www.lds21.ie](http://www.lds21.ie).

St Vincent's is a non-selective school. As evidenced by the composition of its current student cohort, school management and staff welcome, respect and accommodate students from all backgrounds and abilities. The school's admissions policy was reviewed recently to establish clearer selection criteria for admissions to the school. The board should revisit those aspects of the admissions policy referring to their right to refuse the enrolment of applicants in exceptional cases. To support the inclusive ethos that permeates the school, it is recommended that the board should document all the in-school procedures that will be adhered to when addressing these exceptional circumstances.

School management is committed to ensuring that students work in a safe and ordered environment. A code of behaviour that informs students and parents about the rules of the school has been drawn up, and a separate policy on suspension and expulsion is currently in draft format. Commendably, information is provided in the students' journal on the code of behaviour. However, the accessibility of the language used in the journal needs to be reviewed. There was general agreement among staff that the current code of behaviour is in need of a review, in order to actively promote positive behaviour and re-examine the ladder of interventions applied. The senior management team discontinued the year-head system a number of years ago. As a result, the current ladder of referral of students comprises the class teacher, form teacher in some instances, and then on to the senior management team. Serious behavioural issues are brought to the attention of the board. It is recommended that the board make arrangements for a complete review of the code of behaviour. As part of this review, it is important that all aspects of school life that impact on student behaviour are considered. This review should focus on developing a code of behaviour that is clearly linked to the mission statement of the school, actively promotes and affirms positive behaviour, sets standards for acceptable behaviour and responds effectively to unacceptable behaviour. To encourage a whole-school approach to managing behaviour, all roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined. A tiered approach to the consistent use of appropriate sanctions needs to be fostered and encouraged. In this context particular attention should focus on the current practices in relation to the use of short-term suspensions. As a clear and graded ladder of intervention needs to be developed, it is recommended that the re-introduction of a year-head system should be considered. To promote and reward positive behaviour among students, the school should consider the benefits of enhancing the role of the students' awards and sports awards schemes. The draft policy on suspension and expulsion should be finalised as part of this process and included in a whole-school code of behaviour policy. This review could be led in-school by a working group representative of the whole-school community. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) publication *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* at [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie) should be consulted in progressing this work.

It is highly commendable that a care team has been established recently in the school. The collective wisdom, experience and local knowledge provided by this team should ensure that a focused and co-ordinated support structure is in place for students. The work of this team will support a holistic approach to the effective management of students in the school.

A number of initiatives have been recently introduced by the school to monitor and track students' attendance. This includes the installation of an electronic tracker system and the appointment, on a part-time basis, of a SCP administrator to follow up attendance. The school secretary makes the quarterly reports to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). Responsibility for attendance and punctuality also forms part of an assistant principal's post. There is however, a lack of clarity about the responsibilities attached to this post, since the advent of these other initiatives. It is recognised by the school that there is difficulty with some students' punctuality and attendance. It was also noted that a roll

call did not take place in some of the lessons observed during the evaluation, and that students who had been missing on the previous day did not present notes of explanation to teachers. This practice should be reviewed. An attendance strategy has been drafted by the principal. However this document has not as yet been discussed with other partners in the school community. To meet the requirements of the Education Welfare Act 2000, it is recommended that the attendance strategy be finalised in consultation with the whole-school community as soon as it is practicable. This strategy should outline the roles and responsibilities of all staff in the tracking and monitoring of student attendance, and acknowledge the role of the additional supports now available in the school.

There is an active students' council in St Vincent's, whose members are advised and supported effectively by a designated liaison teacher. Agreed procedures underpin the work of the council, and it is obvious that they go about their work in a professional manner. Contact is maintained with the general student body by means of a dedicated notice board that is visibly located on the ground floor. The constitution of the council was amended to extend the membership to include second-year students and to allocate designated positions to newcomer students. These commendable practices support the philosophy of inclusion advocated by the school. To enhance this good work, a mechanism whereby first-year students are included on the council should be considered. The council plays an active role in fundraising for the school and has contributed to the recent review of the school uniform. It is an effective voice for students and has campaigned on their behalf to improve students' facilities in the school. Representatives from the student council have met with the parents' council. This is good practice as it supports the creation of a community spirit. To support the work of the students' council, members should continue to receive training for their roles. The publication *Second Level Student Councils in Ireland: a study of Enablers, Barriers and Supports* (2005) would also prove a useful resource. This document is available through the National Children's Office. Further details are available at [www.nco.ie](http://www.nco.ie).

In keeping with the ethos of partnership reflected in the mission statement, parental involvement in school life is encouraged and supported. The parents' council has been in existence for some time. To date, its contribution to school life has included raising funds to re-furbish classrooms and toilets, as well as having an active role in developing and reviewing some whole-school policies. The joint initiatives with the students' council are particularly noteworthy. It is laudable that the council revised its constitution this year in response to recognition that its role needed to be augmented in the school. The board and senior management are proactively fostering and encouraging the development of a good quality partnership with the council. The work of the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator in supporting the re-drafting of the constitution is particularly commendable. It is laudable that the council intends to become an affiliated member of the National Parents Council (Post-Primary). To enable the parents' council to grow into their role within the wider school community and contribute constructively to school policy formation and review, it is recommended that members seek training for their roles, and be supported by continued guidance from school management.

There are effective lines of communications between the school and parents. Members of the parents' council who met with the inspectors expressed their satisfaction with the open-door policy operated by the senior management team and staff. Parents spoke highly of the work of the form tutors in ensuring the effectiveness of the students' journal as a means of communication. Letters are sent to parents informing them of upcoming trips or activities. Reports of students' progress are sent home on a regular basis. A parent-teacher meeting is held for each year group to provide feedback on students' progress and achievement in each subject area. It was noted that the parent-teacher meeting for Transition Year (TY) was held at lunch time. This may be an inconvenient time for parents. It is recommended that the time of this meeting be changed to comply with the requirements of circular letter M58/04

to facilitate an increased attendance. As a means of augmenting communication between the school and the community it serves, consideration should be given to the development of a school newsletter and website.

#### **1.4 Management of resources**

The staffing allocation from the Department of Education and Science for the current year including concessionary hours and ex-quota positions is 19.43 whole-time teacher equivalents. Almost all permanent whole-time staff members are deployed for the maximum number of class contact hours that their contract allows. The school is dependent on the annual allocation of concessionary hours to supplement the provision of a number of subjects. The uncertainty surrounding the annual allocation of these hours presents significant challenges for management in deploying staff. It is acknowledged that senior management endeavours to deploy teachers to curriculum programmes which are in line with interests and subject expertise. However, it was noted during the course of the evaluation that a number of teachers are teaching subjects in which they do not hold a recognised teaching qualification. While the commitment of all staff involved in the delivery of these subjects is acknowledged, this issue needs to be addressed by management. The current practice undermines the quality of educational provision and students' opportunities, especially when students are being presented for certificate examinations. Therefore, it is recommended that a strategic approach be taken to the current deployment and future appointment of staff to maximise the deployment of all teaching staff in line with their subject specialisms, and to plan for the broadening and implementation of high-quality curriculum programmes in the school. Particular attention needs to be given to planning for the appointment of specialist teachers in the areas of Physical Education, Art, Home Economics, Religious Education (RE) and languages to support the delivery of these subjects in the school.

St Vincent's has been granted supplementary teacher hours by the Department to cater for the changing needs of the student cohort. At the time of the evaluation, a significant proportion of these hours were not being used for the purposes for which they were allocated to the school. It is recommended that management urgently address this issue to ensure that these hours are used effectively to benefit the students for whom they are intended.

There has been a good level of engagement with school-based CPD. It is commendable that senior management recognises and utilises the talents and expertise of its own staff for internal CPD. The efforts and commitment of the members of staff who organised the recent in-service course in the area of information and communication technology (ICT) are highly commended. There is considerable expertise on the staff in a number of other areas. Therefore, the potential of this model of provision of CPD could be explored further by the school management team.

Members of the ancillary staff are very positive about their position in the school and their work is valued by the school community. All members of the ancillary staff are provided with the appropriate resources to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

The main building dates back to 1965. In 1978 the Christian Brothers built a swimming pool and gymnasium complex on the campus, and in 1989 an extension comprising additional classrooms was added. Ownership of the gymnasium, swimming pool and playing fields has been retained by the trustees. These facilities are leased by the school on an annual basis. The school also leases additional rooms in the gymnasium for use as an art room and oratory. The long-term viability of this arrangement should to be considered carefully by the board.



Some good progress has been made in the re-furbishment and upgrading of the school's accommodation. Two science laboratories were recently re-furbished and modernised and the windows in the main building have been replaced under the Summer Works Scheme. The classroom furniture is being upgraded as resources permit. During the course of the evaluation the development of a school library was identified as a priority. It is commendable that a soft reading corner that was funded through the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) will be located in this facility to nurture a positive approach to literacy.

There is good student access to ICT. There are two computer rooms containing networked computers and other associated equipment. A new media room has also been developed. Dedicated ICT facilities are available in some subject areas. Two special-duties post holders make a valuable contribution to the continued upgrading and maintenance of the ICT rooms. They also provide valuable support to other members of staff. It is commendable that an ICT policy has been drafted that includes an acceptable usage policy for all users of ICT in the school.

Parts of the building are in need of upgrading. Space is very limited in the staff room and at present there is no dedicated staff access to ICT facilities. It is recommended, resources permitting, that the board consider the feasibility of providing ICT facilities as part of a staff work room. This room could be used by staff to prepare for lessons and securely store their teaching aids and resources.

Specialist facilities for Art and Home Economics are limited. Practical lessons for students taking Home Economics take place in a room that has been designed to provide meals for students taking part in the homework club. This room does not meet the Department of Education and Science specifications for a specialist room for Home Economics and impacts negatively on the implementation of all of the core disciplines of home economics syllabuses. In the interests of health and safety and high quality curriculum provision, this issue needs attention. The art room is adequately spacious but only has basic facilities for the delivery of art, design and craft courses and activities. Some art lessons are held in general purpose classrooms which have not been altered or customised to support delivery of the subject. While managements' efforts to provide a broad curriculum are acknowledged, the implementation of these materials-based subjects requires specialist equipment and facilities. Such facilities are essential to support students in acquiring and developing the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the practical and written certificate examinations in these subjects.

Subject departments do not have fixed budgets. However management facilitates requests for additional resources as funding permits. It is evident from some of the subjects inspected and in discussions held during the evaluation that some departments are in significant need of the provision of additional resources to facilitate high-quality teaching and learning.

To support the further development of the school buildings and accommodation, it is recommended that the board of management carries out an audit of school accommodation. This should include a needs analysis of all the school resources to identify areas of need. A strategic plan for the systematic upgrading of the remaining facilities should be devised, as resources become available. An annual stock take would prove useful to remove obsolete furniture and equipment and maintain the building to a good standard.

Teachers are not allocated base classrooms. This presents certain difficulties with regard to the storage of subject-specific resources and equipment and the creation of stimulating subject-related learning environments. It may be worthwhile for management, within the context of a full audit of room allocation, to consider the feasibility within the existing

resources and available space, of providing base classrooms for teachers to create more subject-specific areas in the school. This would also address some of the difficulties regarding the maintenance of rooms that were noted during the course of the evaluation.

A whole-school health and safety statement was devised in 2005 and this has been prioritised for review. In reviewing this policy it would be important to evaluate fully the effectiveness of all safety management procedures outlined in the document. The timing of the annual fire drill needs particular attention. The responsibilities of all key personnel involved in health and safety should be documented in the whole-school policy.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 The school plan**

The school development planning process began in 1992, when the main focus was on planning to broaden the curriculum programmes offered in the school. This commendable initiative was aimed at meeting the changing needs of the student cohort. This resulted in the phased introduction of the Transition Year programme (TY), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Since 2000, school planning has focused on developing mandatory whole-school policies. A commendable level of support has been provided by the staff of the Christian Brother Education Development Office during this period. The planning process that underpinned the development of some of the whole-school policies included inclusive practices with regard to the use of sub-committees and collaboration with staff, parents, and students. This good practice is encouraged for the future as a means of creating a shared vision and ownership of the school planning process. The recent establishment of a school planning team is a worthwhile venture. The potential of this group should be fully realised in order to maintain the momentum of school planning, and distribute responsibility among the staff for leading and managing the process. There is a commendable level of shared expertise among members of this team. To optimise its potential, it is recommended that the terms of reference for the school planning team should be clarified and the appointment of a school planning co-ordinator from the schedule of posts of responsibility be considered. A mechanism whereby the planning team reports to the board should also be agreed. The recent appointment by ERST of a charter implementation officer who will work with the school should ensure the school's planning process will make the values outlined in the ERST charter a living reality in the procedures and practices in the school as it moves into the future.

Since 2003 good progress has been made in the development and ratification of whole-school policies. From reviewing these policies it is obvious that they have evolved over time and this has resulted in there being some lack of cohesion among policies. In addition, the content of some policies needs updating. There are instances where there is no agreed timeframe for the review. As policies are being updated or developed it is recommended that they should be clearly dated and linked to the mission statement of the school. The content of all policies should be equality proofed and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in developing and implementing the policy. To develop a culture of self-evaluation, systematic procedures for the implementation, monitoring and review of the school plan and whole-school policies should be established. These procedures should be included in the policy document. As a means of augmenting communication within the school community, consideration could be given to enhancing the mechanism for providing information in relation to policy development to all parents.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M45/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

Since 2005, planning in the school has focused on teaching and learning and the development of subject-department structures. SDPI personnel are assisting this process at school level. There has been considerable whole-staff CPD in areas such as differentiation as well as literacy and numeracy to support this process. However, to gain maximum benefit from whole-school CPD for teaching and learning, it would be important that all subject departments develop clear action plans to incorporate useful strategies into their own subject areas. This need for follow-through has also been recognised by staff. While most subject departments meet on a regular basis, it was reported that there is some inconsistency of practice. To enhance the potential of subject planning, it is recommended that formal time be made available for all subject departments to plan on a regular basis as part of the calendar of staff meetings. Additional meetings can be arranged informally by each teaching team as the need arises.

### **3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION**

#### **3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation**

The school is endeavouring to provide a curriculum programme that meets the needs of its student cohort. A good range of curriculum programmes: Junior Certificate, JCSP, TY, Leaving Certificate and LCA is offered in the school. The school strives to offer a broad range of subjects within each curriculum programme. However, the small size of the school presents significant challenges in planning a broad curriculum. The narrow breadth of subjects offered within each curriculum programme is impacting on the adequacy of the programme to meet the needs of the current cohort of students. The limited range of Leaving Certificate optional subjects currently available also impacts negatively on the school's ability to offer the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

A number of practical subjects are currently being taught by teachers who do not hold a recognised teaching qualification in these subjects. High quality teaching in these subjects requires subject specialists who have the necessary knowledge and skills to support the implementation of a curriculum programme, and who can demonstrate the integrated application of all the relevant core disciplines of each subject. Similar issues of concern in relation to the deployment of suitably qualified staff in the teaching of Gaeilge were also noted.

To move forward and plan effectively for high-quality curriculum provision, it is recommended that a curriculum-review group be established to evaluate the junior and senior cycle programmes currently available and to establish priorities for the further development of these programmes. A systematic plan to broaden the range of subjects that is offered on each of the curriculum programmes should also be developed. As a starting point, optimum use should be made of the subject specialisms and the skills of teachers already employed. The outcomes of this review should form the basis for discussions with the Department on the future provision of concessionary hours for the school.

There is a commendable focus on developing students' ICT skills in the junior cycle and in TY. Good practice is also evident in supporting the further integration of ICT into the teaching and learning of some subject areas.

The TY programme in St Vincent's CBS promotes the school's mission statement of providing students "with a comprehensive and rounded education." The programme aims to provide students with opportunities for personal and social development and encourage students to develop a positive approach to learning. The commitment and enthusiasm of the TY core team in ensuring the success of this programme are commended.

JCSP is only available to students in the third stream class. This is not in keeping with the rationale underpinning this curriculum programme. During the course of the evaluation it was noted that the majority of students who are entered on Department records as following the JCSP are not being profiled. These issues impact negatively on the implementation of JCSP and need to be addressed. Therefore it is recommended that the co-ordination and implementation of JCSP be reviewed to ensure that all students who are at risk of leaving school early derive maximum benefit from the programme.

The introduction of LCA was a laudable initiative designed to address the needs of a specific group of the student cohort. It is commendable that systematic procedures are in place for the monitoring of work experience in LCA, and that there is good informal liaison between the LCA co-ordinator and the teaching team. However, it was noted by the inspectors in some of the subjects evaluated that LCA students were not fulfilling some of the key requirements of the modules being taught. To address this issue, greater liaison between each subject department and the LCA co-ordinator is advised to ensure that planning for students focuses on the full completion of the chosen modules. A systematic, accessible and centralised filing system is required to store students' key assignments.

To support the work of the LCA and JCSP teaching teams, it is recommended that formal meetings of each core team be scheduled at key times during the year. Further engagement with designated in-service for LCA and JCSP is recommended. To assist in the further development of programmes, consideration could be given to devising strategies where the views of parents, students and staff be sought as part of an annual review, thereby further promoting a spirit of productive partnership.

The school calendar with respect to the number of teaching hours per week is compliant with Department regulations. Some good practice was evident in planning the school timetable, especially in relation to the provision of double and single-class periods for optional subjects. However, there is some inconsistency in relation to the number of class periods assigned to some subjects offered to students in the third stream. This needs to be addressed. It is commendable that the deputy principal meets with the programme co-ordinators to discuss timetabled provision for each programme. In this context, the arrangements for work experience in LCA could be reviewed, as the current system impacts negatively on the number of timetabled periods available for some subject areas.

A system of streaming operates in junior cycle. There are three class groups in each year of the Junior Certificate. Placement into a particular class is based on the results achieved by students in the assessment examinations which take place prior to entry. Students who are placed in the top two classes are then streamed for all subjects except Business Studies, Art and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). There are a smaller number of students in the third stream. This class follows a modified curriculum from the beginning of first year, and in a minority of cases, students follow the JCSP. Members of the teaching staff recognise the need to review current practices with regard to streaming. In the interests of students, it is recommended that consideration be given to the re-introduction of mixed-ability groupings for at least part of the Junior Certificate programme. The possibility of

concurrent timetabling for subjects where there is a need to differentiate between levels could be considered for a later stage in the Junior Certificate cycle. A systematic approach to the provision of CPD for teachers in the area of mixed-ability teaching is required to ensure the successful implementation of this initiative.

In timetabling for senior cycle, it is commendable that students who have exemptions from Irish are provided with an opportunity to take an alternative Leaving Certificate subject. This good practice should be extended to students doing TY. The concurrent timetabling arrangements evident in the Leaving Certificate programme are commendable.

### **3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes**

The arrangements for students' choice of Junior Certificate subjects are currently restrictive. The principal allocates junior cycle students to classes on the basis of assessment tests and through liaising with the primary schools. Some movement of students between classes is possible during the first six weeks of first year. Students in the top two streams study nine subjects for the Junior Certificate. All of these subjects are core with one exception, where Business or Art are offered on a pre-set option band. This choice is made at the pre-entry stage. Students in the top two classes do not have access to Music or Home Economics. Students placed in the third stream also take nine subjects but have no access to Science, French or Business. These arrangements are a cause of concern within the school community, and are not in line with the terms and conditions outlined in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004. Contextual factors in relation to staff deployment and pupils' needs are recognised. However, in the interests of all students, it is recommended that the arrangements be reviewed to ensure that junior cycle students have equality of opportunity of access to all subjects, before a final decision is made on subject choices. This review needs to be in the context of a full review of the organisation of class groupings in junior cycle as already recommended.

It is laudable that all students have the opportunity to participate in the TY programme. Member of the students' council who had completed TY stated that the programme was beneficial in making informed Leaving Certificate subject choices. A range of optional subjects is available for Leaving Certificate. Given the size of the school, it is commendable that Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics are all available. Option bands for the Leaving Certificate programme are generated on students' preferences. Management makes every effort to facilitate students in their subject selection. This is good practice.

Guidance and advice are provided for parents and students to assist them in choosing subject options and school programmes. Information evenings are held for parents of first-year and third-year students. Parents have the option of making additional appointments with the principal or with the guidance counsellor. To enhance communication, consideration could be given to the publication of more up-to-date brochures outlining the current curriculum provision in the school.

### **3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision**

There is a strong tradition of sport in the school. Students participate in Gaelic football, hurling and soccer and have successfully participated in local and provincial competitions. Activities such as the hosting of an annual sports day and the staff-student football matches provide students with an opportunity to be involved in physical activity for fun. A chess club also operates during lunch time.

A variety of school trips is planned as part of the extra-curricular programme. Students are also involved in producing a sixth-year school booklet to commemorate their time spent in St Vincent's school. The level of engagement of the majority of the TY teaching team with the provision of co-curricular trips or activities for TY students is particularly praiseworthy. The hosting of an annual *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is a laudable initiative to support students in developing their language skills and it also provides opportunities to experience Irish culture and traditions outside of the traditional classroom environment. It is commendable that photographs, posters and mementoes illustrating various extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are displayed in the school corridors. These displays should be updated regularly.

Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are seen as a valuable part of the education programme offered in the school. It is obvious that the students' involvement in these activities reinforces a sense of community and school spirit, and promotes positive relations among the whole-school community. The efforts and commitment displayed by staff in providing and supporting such activities are highly commended. Such activities broaden students' knowledge, experience and ultimate enjoyment of learning. This work is highly valued by the students, parents and the school management.

To extend the good practice and increase levels of student participation in extra-curricular activities, the role of the SCP and other external agencies in the provision of additional activities should be considered by management.

#### **4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS**

##### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

The school is engaged in subject-department planning and there is evidence of good collaboration among teachers in the different subject departments. In most cases, subject-department meetings take place on an official basis to progress planning. Generally there is a co-ordinator in place for each subject. This is good practice. Frequent informal meetings of subject teachers also take place. Meetings are used to share best practice and to discuss the progress of students.

Planning documentation was inspected in the course of the evaluation. It is recommended that all long-term plans for subjects be developed to include aims, objectives, learning outcomes, criteria for access to higher and ordinary level and information on effective teaching methodologies, including how ICT will be used. The resources which will be used to support teaching and learning should also be documented in the plan.

In the development of subject-department plans, cognisance needs to be taken of curricular programmes on offer in the school, and of appropriate planning for these. Planning for students who are following the TY and LCA should be further developed in accordance with the programme guidelines. Comprehensive information on planning for these programmes is available on the website of the Second Level Support Service at [www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie). Particular attention in planning for these programmes at subject level should be on documenting the relevant teaching methodologies associated with the programmes.

In the individual lessons observed there was evidence of short-term planning. Many lessons in terms of teachers' input and students' activities were well planned. The aims and objectives for these lessons were clear and this contributed to good quality learning. This good practice is to be commended.

It is recommended that the differentiated needs of students be taken into account when planning for the delivery of subjects. This is particularly relevant when planning for mixed-ability class groupings.

## **4.2 Learning and teaching**

A positive atmosphere conducive to learning was evident in all of the lessons observed. Classroom management was effective and discipline was maintained at all times. Evidence of the use of the student journal as a means of promoting positive behaviour was observed, in one instance. This is very good practice and it is encouraged for all lessons and across all subjects.

Teacher expectations for their students were high and students were constantly affirmed, encouraged and supported by their teachers. Very good practice was observed in instances where the lesson objectives were written on the board at the beginning of the lesson, previous learning was reviewed and written homework was checked in order to set the stage for moving on. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons.

The pace of most lessons was appropriate for the activities being undertaken and also for the aptitudinal and motivational composition of class groups. Work generally progressed in an orderly and efficient manner, maximising student learning opportunities. This is effective practice. Language appropriate to the needs of the students was used and students benefited from the clear instructions given by the teachers.

A wide range of teaching methodologies was observed during the evaluation. Best practice was observed where there was a balance between teacher-centred presentations and students' active engagement with lesson content. Some examples of well-managed group and pair work were observed. The potential for students to benefit from a co-operative learning approach was enhanced by the inclusion of these activities. It is recommended that this good practice be developed, and that teachers consider a range of teaching methodologies to increase students' active engagement in their own learning.

The effective use of questioning to check levels of knowledge and understanding was observed in a number of lessons. Best practice was observed where students were given time to formulate their answers and encouraged to put up their hands. Consideration should be given to the further use of questioning as a methodology in order to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students.

Advance planning and preparation was observed to have positive outcomes for both students' engagement and understanding. The minimal use of the textbook was observed in one subject and learning was supported by appropriate handouts and worksheets in a number of lessons. This is effective practice.

Evidence of differentiation was observed in the manner in which some lessons were conducted and where students were given an opportunity to achieve according to their ability. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.

The effective integration of ICT as both a teaching and learning tool and a student research resource was observed in a number of lessons. It is recommended that the potential of ICT to enhance teaching and learning should be fully exploited in all lessons. When ICT is being used for researching project work, students should be given advice on how to synthesise the information they are accessing.

Print-rich learning environments were observed in a number of lessons. This is very good practice, as it simulates and motivates students to learn. It is recommended that classroom environments be developed to support learning. This is of particular importance in the room in use for first-year art, as part of an effort to increase the students' encounters with historical and contemporary art and design imagery.

In general, teachers were very knowledgeable regarding their subject areas and the content of lessons was appropriate to programme requirements. In the case of languages other than English, teachers should employ teaching methodologies and strategies that promote more effectively the use of the target language as the medium of communication in the classroom.

### **4.3 Assessment**

A variety of assessment modes, both formative and summative, is employed to monitor and assess student achievements in the curricular areas evaluated. Formative assessment comprises oral questioning in class, observation of work undertaken during class, coursework assignments, homework and project work. It is recommended, in a number of the areas evaluated: that the expected learning outcomes should be developed and stated in planning documents, that these should be shared with the students at the outset of class and that they should be used to inform assessment criteria. It was noted that oral language skills are assessed in a minority of cases. The good practice of assessing all of the main language skills is in line with the aims and objectives of language syllabuses and should be extended to all classes including the language components of the TY programme.

Homework was set and corrected in some instances. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classes as it provides students with essential opportunities to reinforce classroom learning. Cognisance should be taken of the course requirements and of the range of skills to be developed when assigning homework. It is good practice to set and regularly correct the work assigned to students. Particularly praiseworthy are those instances where a constructive approach was taken to the correction of students' work. Providing students with positive feedback on their work and guiding them in ways to improve their learning is good practice. It is recommended that all teachers engage in promoting this good practice.

It was noted in one of the areas evaluated that students profiling had not taken place in the case of the majority of students participating in the JCSP. It is strongly recommended that in the case of all students participating in the programme, the practice of profiling is correctly implemented. Learning statements assist students in breaking down the syllabus into manageable-sized pieces and therefore should be drawn from a broad range of syllabus areas. The profiling process is invaluable in fostering and developing the students' capacity to set their own learning targets, reflect on their learning and engage in self-assessment.

In the case of the LCA, students' key assignments were not available for examination in two of the areas evaluated. It is strongly recommended that, in line with the programme requirements, all students complete all the relevant key assignments on a phased basis and that they are available for examination.

It is school policy to hold formal house examinations at Christmas for all students. Students preparing for state examinations sit mock examinations, typically during the second term, and non-state examination students sit further house examinations at the end of the school year. A formal report on students' achievements in the house and mock examinations is issued to parents twice a year. Parents are provided with opportunities to discuss their



children's progress at parent-teacher meetings, or during further meetings which may be organised on an individual basis if desired. This is good practice.

## **5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**

### **5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs**

St Vincent's school has one fulltime ex-quota learning-support teacher allocation. The school also receives significant designated-teacher allocations to support the inclusion of students with additional educational needs. There is a commendable level of expertise among the three teachers involved in the provision of learning support. Four special needs assistants (SNA) provide valuable assistance to students in their care. In the current academic year approximately thirty-eight resource hours have been granted to support students who have a particular learning need. However, at the time of the evaluation, a significant proportion of the designated resource hours were not deployed for the purposes for which they were intended. To ensure compliance with Department circular PPT 01/05, it is recommended that school management urgently review the allocation of resource hours to ensure that all students who are allocated these hours can derive full benefit from them.

Learning support is only available at present to junior cycle students. In each year group, the majority of students in receipt of this support are placed in the one class where extra tuition in Maths and English is provided. Students in these classes follow a modified curriculum as outlined in section three of this report. Re-testing takes place during the first term and students may be re-assigned to classes following discussions with class teachers. A small number of other junior cycle students are withdrawn for additional support in literacy and numeracy. It is acknowledged that the small size of the junior cycle group allows teachers to provide individual support for students. However, as a number of students who have been allocated resource hours are now in senior cycle, the current practices are not in the best interests of those who have been identified to have special educational needs. In the interests therefore, of optimising inclusive practice and supporting individual students' needs, it is recommended that the model of organisation for the provision of resource and learning-support teaching hours be reviewed. The revised model should ensure that additional support is not confined to junior cycle. All students should have equality of access to all subjects, before final decisions are made in relation to subject choices and the assignment of students to class groups. This review should be in the context of consideration of the re-introduction of mixed-ability class arrangements which was strongly recommended in section three of this report.

A clearly identifiable learning-support and special-educational needs department, led by a co-ordinator should be established. In addition to co-ordinating the learning-support and resource hours, the co-ordinator should also have a role in liaising with the parents of students who have special educational needs, the feeder primary schools and the relevant external agencies. The modes of delivery used to provide additional-education support need to be extended to maximise the inclusion of students within the school community. A more whole-school approach for supporting students with special educational needs is essential. The recent whole-school CPD training in the general area of learning and literacy is a laudable initiative in supporting this approach. Further CDP workshops on differentiated learning would support staff in developing tailored teaching and learning strategies to support the wide range of students' learning needs which are typically found in mixed-ability settings. Further information and advice is available from the Special Education Support Service ([www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie)) and the Second Level Support Services ([www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie)).

All first-year students are assessed, using diagnostic tests, prior to entry to the school, to identify potential learning difficulties. Parents and personnel from the feeder primary

schools are also consulted as part of this process. It is recognised by the learning-support teachers, that the assessment tests being used currently are in need of updating. It is therefore recommended, that the learning-support team, in consultation with the guidance counsellor, explore the option of introducing new test instruments that could be used for initial testing and the subsequent monitoring of students' progress. Department circular letter 0009/07 provides a list of appropriate tests. This list is updated annually and is available for consultation by schools at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

It is commendable that the learning-support teachers have been timetabled for a weekly planning meeting. This practice should effectively facilitate collaborative planning for students' specific learning needs. The good practice of keeping records of meetings was noted. Basic learning plans are devised for the students currently receiving support but the learning-support teachers recognise that there is scope for more development in this area. As individual education plans (IEPs) are due to become mandatory as part of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004, the further development of individual learning plans for students is an important precursor to this event. Good practice suggests that all students in receipt of additional support should have individual learning plans. The assessment of the individual student learning outcomes identified in the learning plans will serve to refine the additional supports that are necessary. The weekly meeting time allocated to the learning-support team should be used to progress this work and review students' progress. Further advice and information on the IEP process are available in *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process*. This publication is available from the National Council for Special Education Needs at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

A designated room and a range of additional resources are available for use by the learning-support teachers. However, it is acknowledged that these resources are in need of updating and that access to dedicated ICT facilities is limited. These issues should be addressed in the context of the audit of accommodation and resources recommended in section one of this report.

The admissions policy includes detailed procedures for supporting inclusion. A whole-school learning-support policy has been in draft form for some time, but has not yet been circulated for consultation with the stakeholders. It is recommended that a whole-school policy on the provision of education for students with special education needs be finalised by a relevant sub-committee. This should then be circulated to management, staff and representatives of parents and students for consultation and be ratified, as soon as it is practicable. This policy should set out the range of supports available in the school and include procedures in relation to the deployment of SNAs. This would clarify their role and act as a guide for all members of staff. The procedures documented in this policy should be underpinned by principles of inclusion as outlined in the Department publication *Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines*.

One teacher co-ordinates the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL) to newcomer students. It is commendable that the board subsidised the cost of post-graduate training for the co-ordinator to facilitate necessary upskilling in this area. The co-ordinator acts as an effective point of contact with parents.

Many initiatives that aim to support inclusion operate in the school. It is laudable that the admissions policy includes an additional form specifically designed to gather personal information that is used to plan for the needs of newcomer students. The co-ordinator runs a short induction programme to support newcomer students in gaining confidence in their new environment. Members of the students' council who met with the inspectors spoke highly of this programme in supporting them in settling into their new school. It is commendable that a buddy system is being planned for next year. There is a dedicated notice board celebrating cultural diversity within the school, and events such as an

intercultural week have been held in the past. These highly commendable events are further encouraged, as a means of supporting and celebrating the rich cultural diversity in the school.

Arrangements are in place to withdraw newcomer students in small groups for one period per week to provide additional language support. A designated classroom and a good range of resources are available to support this work. An allocation of forty-four hours has been granted by the Department to provide additional language supports to newcomer students. At the time of the evaluation however, a significant proportion of this time was redirected for other uses by school management. This matter needs urgent review. It is recommended that school management ensures that the full allocation of hours for English as an additional language (EAL) is used for the purpose for which they were allocated and in accordance with circular M 53/07. This will ensure that newcomer students have greater access to language support over the teaching week. Furthermore, it is recommended that the language proficiency benchmarks be used to assess and monitor students' progress. In order to promote a whole-school approach to support the inclusion of newcomer students, it is recommended that the co-ordinator of EAL liaise with the subject teachers to compile a list of key words to support students in accessing technical language on the curriculum.

A good range of supports is available to encourage the effective participation of students who are socially disadvantaged. Students' needs are treated with discretion and sensitivity. Practical assistance towards the cost of school expenses is granted on an individual and confidential basis. The school has access to a home-school-community liaison co-ordinator (HSCL) for eleven hours per week as part of the school support available under DEIS. The co-ordinator has been of great assistance in revitalising the parents' council and in establishing links with families and feeder-primary schools. It is intended to develop a parents' room and host a number of parents' courses in the near future. This good work is encouraged, as a means of further enhancing the community spirit in the school. The co-ordinator allocation is shared with another second-level school which belongs to a different HSCL cluster. It was reported that this presents significant logistical difficulties for the co-ordinator in carrying out the duties of the post. A homework club operates under the remit of the SCP. Students attending this club are provided with a hot meal before they begin their homework. This club is recognised by staff and parents as providing a very important daily point of contact with students. The provision of a breakfast club and of food at lunch-time is also being considered. These initiatives are worth pursuing. The school has developed productive links with local community groups and agencies to support the educational interests of its student cohort. The commitment and enthusiasm of all staff involved in these projects are recognised and commended.

As the work of the HSCL scheme, SCP and other external agencies continues to strengthen and expand in the school, mechanisms to facilitate effective communication between staff and these partners need to be established.

## **5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context**

The school has 0.5 ex-quota teacher allocation for Guidance. An additional seven hours has been allocated for Guidance by management. This good practice supports the provision of an enhanced guidance programme to support students' guidance and counselling needs. It is commendable that personnel involved in Guidance are facilitated to attend relevant CPD training arranged for guidance counsellors.

Good facilities are available for Guidance. The guidance counsellor has an office with a dedicated phone line and a computer with internet access. Students have access to dedicated computers in a separate room. Access for classes to the computer rooms can be arranged in

advance. Display stands and notice boards with information about careers and college open day events are provided on the corridors for students.

Guidance is integrated into a number of school programmes. The guidance counsellor plays a role in the transfer of students from primary to secondary school through visiting the feeder primary schools and assisting in the assessment of students, prior to entry to the school. There is a good level of participation by the guidance counsellor in the senior cycle curriculum programmes in the school and some support is also available for third-year students. A key feature of the guidance programme in the school is the successful student-access programme. It is evident that this programme effectively stimulates students' interest and motivation levels to progress to third-level education. It was noted positively that past students' initial destinations are also tracked by the guidance department. Parents are assisted to understand the range of supports provided by the school, and the guidance counsellor meets by appointment with any parent who wishes to discuss concerns of their children. This is good practice.

A whole-school approach to guidance and counselling is being adopted by school management. It is commendable that the guidance counsellor is a member of the new care team. This is essential to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to providing care for students in the school. The guidance counsellor has also supported the development of a critical incidents policy for the school with advice from the National Educational Psychological Services Agency (NEPS). The principal is currently the main link with many of the external agencies. Responsibility for these links could be devolved, over time, to staff, including the guidance counsellor.

The school guidance plan is at a very early stage of development. It is recognised by management that there is a need to progress a whole-school guidance plan as recommended in Department circular PPT 12/05. It is commendable that the relevant documents that were circulated to schools by the Department are informing the process. It is recommended that a whole-school guidance plan be finalised as soon as it is practicable. The plan should be drafted by a sub-committee of all relevant personnel, after an analysis of school needs has been completed, and in consultation with staff, parents and students. The plan should clearly show how all of the guidance allocation is used to support students' personal, social, and educational needs and career choices. Therefore, it should contain details of the guidance programme or intervention for each year group and school programme, information on how students' transitions are handled and how liaison with parents is arranged. As all students need access to Guidance, the plan should in particular include ways to link Guidance programmes with Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to provide support for junior cycle students. Linkages with the HSCL scheme, SCP and other outside agencies, including third-level and further education colleges, industry, employers and outside speakers should also be included. Short-term and long-term objectives as well as learning outcomes should be documented for each year group and curriculum programme. The ratified plan should be reviewed on an annual basis and adjusted to meet presenting needs. Further information and advice is available from the SDPI at [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) at [www.ncge.ie](http://www.ncge.ie).

The provision of pastoral care of students is seen as being the responsibility of all staff in the school. Parents identified the caring and supportive manner of staff in dealing with students in their care, as an aspect of the school with which they are most happy. Each class group has a designated form tutor who plays an important role in supporting the pastoral care of students, and is a key point of contact with parents. The effectiveness of the form-tutor role was acknowledged by management and parents and their work is commended. The role of form tutor, while not clearly spelt out, has a pastoral and disciplinary dimension. One notable feature of the pastoral support system is the recent formation of a school care team. In addition, personnel from the SCP, Finglas-Cabra Partnership, Finglas

Youth Services and the teaching staff provide valuable personal support to students in the areas of bereavement, loss, self-esteem and anti-bullying. To build on the good work already evident and in order to formalise the work already being done, it is recommended that an overarching pastoral care policy be documented. This plan should help to develop the identity of the care team more clearly and define their functions and interactions with other staff members. It should also outline clearly the procedures to be followed in difficult cases that may arise from time to time. This will ensure that a systematic approach is taken to the pastoral care of students in the school. Duties of the form tutors need to be agreed and documented as part of this process.

As a means of cultivating and nurturing a sense of larger group identity and augmenting the support for students, consideration should be given to the re-introduction of a year-head system as part of the range of pastoral support provided. The merit of holding regular year-group meetings should be considered to provide a forum where positive behaviours and achievements could be recognised and celebrated.

All junior cycle students are timetabled for SPHE as outlined in circular M11/03. To optimise the role of SPHE in providing for the social, personal and health education of students, it is recommended that a three-year programme of work that demonstrates a coherent and balanced coverage of the ten modules of the SPHE curriculum framework be collaboratively developed by the SPHE team. Some formal planning time should be made available to the teachers of SPHE, as part of the calendar of subject-department meetings to assist this process. Furthermore, it is recommended that a relationships and sexuality education policy (RSE) be developed in accordance with circular M 27/08. The guidelines produced by the Department of Education and Science should be used to inform the drafting of this policy. This information is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Some key policies that relate to the care of students have been developed and are being implemented. To complement the anti-bullying charter, it is recommended that a whole-school anti-bullying policy, that is in line with the Department's guidelines, should be developed. Further advice and support on developing an anti-bullying policy is available on the Department's website.

The spiritual development of students is supported by the calendar of events. It is commendable that the diversity of religious backgrounds is acknowledged and celebrated as part of this process. The oratory is potentially a great asset to the school and could be developed as a focal point for the whole-school community.

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- St Vincent's has an inclusive and Christian ethos. The school strives to meet the needs of its student cohort that comes from a wide diversity of abilities and social backgrounds.
- An informed, concerned and collaborative approach is being adopted by the board of management to managing the school. The rich diversity of background and experience among board members are an asset to the school.
- School management is proactively fostering and encouraging the development of good quality partnerships with the parents' council, student council and a number of external agencies to support the educational interests of students.
- There is a good level of on-going engagement with school-development planning. The trustees have provided valuable assistance throughout this process.

- A commendable level of expertise is evident among the staff, and there has been a good level of engagement with school-based CPD.
- A good range of curriculum programmes is offered in the school. There is a commendable focus on developing students' ICT skills.
- The co-curricular and extra-curricular programme reinforces a sense of community and school spirit and promotes positive relations among the whole-school community.
- A positive atmosphere conducive to learning was evident in all of the lessons observed. Teacher expectations for their students were high and students were constantly affirmed, encouraged and supported by their teachers.
- The collective wisdom, experience and local knowledge of the recently-established care team will support a focused and co-ordinated support structure for students.
- The spiritual development of students is supported by the calendar of liturgical services, retreats and religious education lessons. Cultural and spiritual diversity is acknowledged as part of this process.

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

- A comprehensive review of the schedule of posts of responsibility should be carried out following an analysis of the needs of the school to ensure that the potential of middle management is fully realised.
- To cultivate a sense of shared ownership for the future development of the school, communication and decision-making practices among the school community needs to be reviewed and strengthened.
- The implementation of all the curriculum programmes needs to be reviewed, and a systematic plan developed to broaden the range of subjects offered on each programme. To support the implementation of high-quality curriculum programmes, school policies and procedures need to proactively encourage and facilitate teachers to attend relevant CPD to the greatest extent possible.
- The re-introduction of mixed-ability groupings for at least part of the Junior Certificate programme should be considered. All students should have equality of access to all subjects before final decisions are made in relation to subject choices and the assignment of students to class groups.
- The deployment of resource and EAL hours needs urgent review.
- The code of behaviour should be reviewed to promote positive student behaviour, set standards for acceptable behaviour and respond effectively to unacceptable behaviour.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

## **7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS**

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of Art – 11 April 2008
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – 9 April 2008
- Subject Inspection of Science – 10 April 2008
- Transition Year Programme Evaluation Inspection of Science – 8 April 2008

# Appendix

## SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

### Submitted by the Board of Management

#### Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The Board of Management of St. Vincent's welcomes this WSE Report and its positive content and tone. It notes the due recognition of the inclusive and caring nature of the school community. The Report's commendations and affirmations of students, staff and school management are welcome.
- The Board appreciates the professionalism and courtesy with which the DES Evaluation Team engaged with all the education partners in our school.

#### 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 welcomes the constructive recommendations made by the evaluation team.
- Some of these recommendations were in process at the time of the evaluation, others have since been put in place, and the remainder will be carefully examined by the Board as part of our next planning cycle.
- Implementation, however, of some of the report's recommendations are and will remain subject to DES sanction of qualified personnel and the provision of the necessary funding.