An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Beaufort College
Navan, County Meath
Roll number: 72010I

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Beaufort College was undertaken in February 2010. 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 were evaluated in detail and one subject evaluation was carried out in advance. Separate reports are available on these four subjects (see section 7 for details). 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.

INTRODUCTION

Beaufort College was founded in 1913 as Navan Technical School. Since then it has moved site on two occasions, most recently in 1984 due to expanding numbers. It now occupies a ten-acre site on the south-west side of Navan. The school comes under the auspices of Co. Meath Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and is the only co-educational post-primary school in the town, sitting alongside two girls' post-primary schools and a boys' post-primary school. There are 419 students, almost eighty percent of them male, currently undertaking Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, along with eighty-nine students studying Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. In addition, Beaufort College operates the largest adult and continuing education programme in the county, with 765 participants in autumn 2009.

The school participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skill's action plan for educational inclusion. It benefits from the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP) and it is supported by the National Behaviour Support Service in the management and operation of a behaviour support classroom known as Dóchas.

Feeder primary schools include those in Navan town itself, as well as a selection from the surrounding areas, most particularly to the east of the town. Beaufort College operates an open and inclusive enrolment policy and aims to achieve "a balanced intake that reflects the community it serves". In fact, the school welcomes an impressively wide range of students, creating quite a unique and vibrant school population.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school's mission statement, currently being reviewed, makes a commitment to quality education for all students in a caring atmosphere of good order and discipline. Its focus is on enriching students' lives and empowering them for life's challenges. The statement is included in most planning documentation and is prominent in the teachers' handbook and around the school building. Its inclusion in the student diary should be considered, so as to increase its relevance for students and their parents.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Co. Meath VEC expressed a vision for the school of commitment to excellence and innovation achieved through quality personnel, quality teaching and a caring environment. During the inspection there was evidence to suggest that this vision was materialising. The board of management emphasised the notion of fair play for all, with inclusion and integration being particularly important in meeting the needs

of students. The board believes the school is a caring place committed to excellence in education and organisation. Members of the parents' council described the school as welcoming and expressed appreciation that teachers made the effort to get to know each individual student.

The physical school environment reflects an ethos of inclusion. School photographs and artwork on display are signs of the diverse and dynamic school population. The dedicated and much-used parents' room is indicative of the culture of partnership embraced by the school. The observation of a weekly parents' cookery lesson underlined the success of the school in being a resource for parents as well as for students. There is a consciousness at management level of the role played by the school in the wider local community. This is evident by the fact it provides a large adult and continuing education programme, it runs four PLC programmes and it makes school facilities available for the use of local community groups.

The school atmosphere observed during the inspection was orderly and generally welcoming. In addition, mutual respect between teachers and students was in evidence.

1.2 School ownership and management

At the time of the evaluation, a new board of management, properly constituted, had just begun its term of office. One member maintains continuity with the previous board, as does the principal, an ex-officio member. Members of the previous board attended training on the role and functions of a board of management at the beginning of their tenure. It is intended that new members will participate in training to be offered in the near future by Co. Meath VEC. Recent concerns of the board have focused on policy review and enrolment issues, in particular the achievement of an equitable enrolment of all sectors of the local school-going population vis-à-vis the other schools in the town.

Meetings of the outgoing board normally took place every four to six weeks during the school year, indicating the importance placed by the board on its function within the school. The new board should consider producing an agreed written report of its meetings for communication to the parent and teacher bodies. The written text should be prepared by the secretary to the board in consultation with the chairperson.

The parents' council is long standing and plays a significant role in the life of the school. Committee members work closely with the home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator to increase parents' involvement in school activities. At the time of the inspection, parents' council committee members had not engaged in training specific to their role. However, training opportunities had been identified and it was intended that a number of members would attend so as to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of the committee's work.

The parents' council is largely engaged in fundraising to support school activities, but it has been a partner in the policy development process—for example, the anti-bullying and substance misuse policies—and it has proposed initiatives, such as peer mentoring, that the school is acting upon. The committee meets monthly with average attendance of eight to ten parents and good lines of communication with the school are maintained through attendance at these meetings by the principal and a teacher nominee.

The parents' council's priorities for the future development of the school include the continuing upgrading of school facilities, increased involvement with the student council and the spreading of information in the wider community about the very good work being done in the school.

1.3 In-school management

The senior management team consists of the principal and the deputy principal, who is in her first year in the school. The team, therefore, is in the early stages of building a professional relationship and individual roles are still evolving. However, their interactions are characterised by openness and co-operation. They discuss routine activities and issues at the beginning and end of each day, and have scheduled meetings once in the week. Longer-term planning is addressed by them at meetings arranged during students' holiday periods.

Together, the principal and deputy principal hold complementary visions for the school as a centre of quality education, one in which all students have equal access to the formal and informal curricula. They reflect on successful leadership practices, and lead by example, in relation to consultation and decision making.

Quality learning and teaching is promoted in the school through supporting teachers in their work, through DEIS planning with its focus on raising expectations, through keeping high achievement on the agenda of staff meetings and through the promotion of information and communications technology (ICT) as a valuable teaching and learning tool. Teachers are actively encouraged by senior management to reflect on their practices in a changing school environment.

The senior management team indicated that the school's schedule of posts of responsibility is revised every two years and is currently due for revision. The principal and deputy are satisfied that the schedule addresses the needs of the school. Post holders sign up to listed duties and many make an annual written report on the performance of these duties to the board. School management hopes that this will be undertaken by all post holders in the near future.

There are weekly timetabled meetings of assistant principals with senior management at which whole-school issues are discussed and short and medium-term planning undertaken. Special duties teachers met formally with the principal on one occasion last year. Scheduled end-of-year meetings between individual post holders and senior management do not currently take place. Such meetings can assist post holders in identifying and communicating post-related issues to senior management and allow for priorities to be set for the coming year. They are also an important source of encouragement and support for all members of middle management and so should be incorporated into the school's annual schedule.

Systems in place to facilitate effective communication with staff include announcements at the morning break, calendar of events, teachers' handbook, principal's notices in the staff room, text messages and email messages. It is notable that minutes of assistant principals' meetings are prepared by the deputy principal and circulated to all members of staff.

Full staff meetings are scheduled this year to coincide with the dates of parent-teacher meetings. On these dates, staff meetings take place in the mornings and parent-teacher meetings in the afternoons. School management is reminded of the agreed arrangements for parent-teacher and staff meetings, Circular Letter M58/04, the terms of which still apply. Under this three parent-teacher meetings per year should run during specified evening hours and one staff meeting per term should have one half of its time allocation from outside normal school hours.

Communication with parents is characterised by flexibility, with parents encouraged to visit the school to discuss their concerns, even without appointment. The HSCL co-ordinator, in as far as possible, visits the homes of all incoming first-year students during their period of transition. In addition, parents are invited into the school for courses on, for example, cookery or parenting skills. It is particularly appropriate that such courses take place both during the day and in the evening in order to maximise parents' participation. Parents can also access the school's website or are kept informed through the colourful, professional and informative school newsletters that are published approximately three times in the year. Brief information regarding, for example, parent-teacher meetings or information evenings is also sent by text message to relevant parents. Links are maintained with past pupils, a number of whom return to the school on special occasions in a gesture of support.

Teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is addressed in part through the organisation of staff development days. For example, in December 2009, staff attended an externally facilitated workshop on Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) followed by meetings on a literacy project, on discipline and on the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). In addition, individual or small groups of teachers are supported in accessing available in-service courses during school time, provided their absence does not result in excessive disruption to school business. The board of management expressed pride in the fact that two teachers from the school are involved in a county-wide VEC training initiative and act as ICT mentors for other teachers.

The school's admissions policy, ratified in 2005, is committed to welcoming students regardless of class, ability or gender. It refers to the Equal Status Act, 2000, and undertakes not to discriminate on eight of the nine grounds specified in the Act. It is recommended that the missing ground now be included in this list. The admissions policy puts special conditions on the admission of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to the school. It should be made clear that such conditions will apply only in exceptional circumstances. For students refused enrolment to fifth year, the right to appeal the school's decision is stated in the admissions policy. A statement should be included clarifying that such a right to appeal applies to all students who are refused enrolment by the school.

Beaufort College operates a year head and class tutor system as a means of managing the care, discipline and academic matters that are normal elements of student life. The roles have evolved in recent years and, in line with good practice, they have now been formalised and documented in the teachers' handbook. This assists in ensuring clarity and supporting effectiveness in these vital areas.

The student council is made up of eight sixth-year representatives and four fifth-year observers. Its roles centre on organising the graduation ball and creating the sixth-year year book. It is recommended, in line with Department guidelines *Student Councils: a voice for students*, that the council adopts a wider representative structure and promotes the involvement of students of all ages in school affairs, including policy development. In line with the Education Act, 1998, the guidance of the board of management in drawing up rules for the establishment of the council is recommended.

Student attendance and punctuality are key areas that require to be addressed by schools operating within the DEIS initiative. Attendance is monitored by the year heads who liaise with the school's attendance secretary. Records for 2007-2008 were included in the school plan. These statistics along with up-to-date attendance figures should form part of the baseline data for the school's DEIS plan.

The code of behaviour for students emphasises co-operation with teachers, the creation of a pleasant working environment based on mutual courtesy and respect, and the achievement of each student's full potential. The code is currently under review by a task group formed

from the school's discipline committee and priority should be given to progressing this work. The revised code of behaviour should be distributed to parents and students, perhaps through the student diary. In line with *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* published by the National Educational Welfare Board, the code should focus more on positive behaviour and the promotion of personal responsibility, and include the school's plan for promoting good behaviour. School procedures for implementing sanctions up to and including suspension and expulsion should be accompanied by a statement of the right of appeal of parents and students over the age of eighteen years.

1.4 Management of resources

The time allocated to individual subject areas is in line with syllabus guidelines and teaching staff, in most cases, are teaching subjects in line with their qualifications and expertise. Generally, teachers' timetables indicate good utilisation of teachers' classroom teaching hours; it is practice within the school to schedule full-time teachers for thirty-five periods per week. However, there is a small number of permanent whole-time staff currently not fulfilling the minimum requirement of eighteen hours' class contact time as required by Department of Education and Skills regulations. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible. In addition, the school is reminded of the maximum timetable allowance for the performance of assistant principal duties and the time allowed on the basis of the school's adult and continuing education programme. Finally, in the preparation of the school timetable, the codes used should accurately reflect the activity assigned to the teacher.

The school accommodation is very good, with a range of specialist rooms for the subjects Art, Metalwork, Materials Technology (Wood)/Construction Studies, Home Economics, Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) and Science. There is a base room for the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL), a careers library, a student welfare office, a parents' room, a Youth Café, a canteen, behaviour support classroom and learning support rooms.

The school library, a JCSP Demonstration Library, was established in early 2009 with the 2009/10 school year being its first full year in service. It is highly impressive with its wide range of resources and equipment. The library is managed by a full-time qualified librarian who is very clear about its purpose and value. Priority access is given to JCSP students, but it is available to all students both during and outside class time. It contains a comprehensive ICT library to support teachers' CPD and there is student access to computer, printing and scanning facilities. The librarian works closely with members of staff, particularly the JCSP co-ordinator, and reports directly to the principal.

The school building is in pristine condition thanks to the work of the excellent maintenance and cleaning team. Corridors and rooms are free of litter and graffiti and the many displays and social areas around the school are well kept and clean. It is a clear indication of the successful establishment of a quality environment that supports quality education.

ICT resources in the school are very good and include a computer in each classroom linked to a central server with, in most cases, a fixed data projector. The DCG department has been upgraded with both hardware and software due to the Department's T4 curriculum initiative and the school has four up-to-date computer rooms. Teaching and learning resources are available, funds permitting, on application to the principal. Given that all subject departments have named co-ordinators, it would be appropriate for requests for resources to come to school management via subject co-ordinators.

Fire extinguishers visible around the school had been very recently serviced, and a fire drill had taken place in the month prior to this inspection. The school safety statement, a VEC

document, was prepared in accordance with 2005 and 2007 legislation. The school's safety committee, the team of assistant principals, is charged with bringing issues of health and safety to the attention of the safety officer, an assistant principal post-holder. In addition, a number of members of staff have undertaken training in first aid. It is recommended that the names of the safety officer and staff first-aiders be included in the teachers' handbook.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

School planning is co-ordinated by a special-duties teacher who has undertaken further study in the area and who attends regular CPD activities run by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) support service. The co-ordinator, who understands clearly the benefits of effective planning, liaises regularly with the principal and, more recently, the deputy with regard to the identification of planning priorities and the progressing of planning activities. Planning priorities are also identified at staff meetings, at meetings of assistant principals and at senior management meetings.

There is currently no dedicated group in the school to drive planning and this is leading to activities happening on an ad hoc basis. It is recommended that a planning steering group, led by the co-ordinator, be established to oversee the school's planning processes. The steering group should play an active role in the development and ongoing progress of all task groups, who should work to agreed timeframes. In addition, it should draw up a checklist to indicate existing ratified up-to-date policies, those identified as requiring to be put in place, policies currently under review, those requiring review, and those awaiting ratification.

It is recommended that all completed school policies include their date of ratification by the board of management, a list of the parties involved in their development or review, and the proposed date for next review. Any amendments implemented prior to formal review should also be ratified at board level and clearly documented.

Subject department planning has had a significant impact on teaching and learning, encouraging collaboration, the sharing of resources and the development of common tests by some teachers. During the evaluation process, subject department plans were made available for inspection. Although there were individual differences, plans generally followed the format proposed by the SDPI and were generally indicative of healthy engagement with the planning process.

The DEIS action plan for the three-year cycle 2009-2012 was reported by the planning co-ordinator as being under development at the time of the inspection. It is vital that this work, which forms the basis of the developmental section of the school plan, be completed as soon as possible.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 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 and school staff. It remains for parents to be informed about the formal procedures. They could be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the policy through its uploading to the school website. Alternatively, it might be presented at the parents' council annual general meeting for the information of all parents. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed, in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school's anti-bullying policy, formulated by a small number of staff members, is, appropriately, based on the Cool Schools programme, an initiative in which Beaufort College participated. Its underlying principle is that every student and every teacher has the right to learn and teach in a supportive, caring and safe environment without the fear of being bullied. On its introduction whole-staff training was provided by the Cool School programme co-ordinator and ladders of referrals and sanctions put in place. Key preventative strategies such as anti-bullying week and surveys of the student body were carried out, most recently in March 2008. It is recommended that these measures be repeated on an annual basis to remind students of the seriousness of bullying and of the school's lack of tolerance of it.

The school plan (permanent section) is a comprehensive file, carefully prepared and containing a mix of information and numerical data. Consideration might be given to condensing or omitting some sections to produce a more manageable document that could be uploaded to the school's website, making the plan accessible to all members of the school community.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Junior-cycle classes are generally organised in two bands according to the ability levels of students in individual year groups, with students in the first bands being encouraged to study all subjects at higher level. This is an appropriate arrangement given the wide ability range of the student intake into the school. The curricular programmes currently running at the school are the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate (established), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses and adult and continuing education courses. Within the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes there is a wide range of subjects and levels available to students.

Curriculum change is ongoing, with innovations introduced to try to ensure students' needs are being met. Music has most recently been added to the curriculum in response to a request from the parents' council. In addition, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is currently being examined with a view to its future introduction.

Schools have a requirement to provide one period per week or equivalent of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) throughout the junior cycle. At Beaufort College, all junior students as well as sixth years have two periods per week of SPHE and fifth years have one period. This provision exceeds requirements and indicates the importance placed by school management on students' personal development. Physical Education is allocated one double period per week in all year groups, commendably maintaining the opportunity for senior students to engage in organised physical activities. All first-year classes are scheduled for a weekly period of ICT, but an agreed programme remains to be put in place. This should be addressed as a matter of priority.

The JCSP has been offered in the school since September 1998. Up until recently it has been closely associated with students with special educational needs. However, with the recent establishment of the JCSP library and the appointment of the qualified librarian, the programme is now appropriately targeted at students most at risk of leaving school early. A draft JCSP policy has been prepared by the librarian in co-operation with the other members of the JCSP core team: the JCSP co-ordinator, the HSCL co-ordinator, the SEN co-ordinator, the SCP project worker and the deputy principal. Its admirable aims are to generate varied, effective and meaningful learning opportunities for students and to ensure that no student becomes an early school leaver. The policy should now be circulated to the

whole staff, the parents' council, the student council and the board of management for consultation and for ratification.

The role of co-ordinator of JCSP is part of a special-duties post of responsibility. It includes monitoring of JCSP students, organisation of activities, dissemination of information to teaching staff, liaising with the JCSP regional/national development teams, and linking with the other members of the core team, all of which are appropriate. Support and teamwork within JCSP are evident from weekly meetings of the core team, once-per-term meetings of the full JCSP teaching team, an end-of-year profiling meeting with relevant teachers and year head, and annual induction by the support service for teachers new to the programme.

It is good practice that JCSP students do not have a separate identity within the school but are fully integrated into all aspects of school life. JCSP students are found in each of the second band class groups from first to third years. All JCSP students take part in an accelerated literacy reading programme and numeracy needs are addressed through the JCSP statements in mathematics class and optional attendance at the school's "maths club". JCSP initiatives for 2009/10, which were decided on at a full staff meeting, include Make-a-Book, reading challenge, paired maths, céilí, geography trip, celebrity chef and summer celebration. These initiatives make a significant contribution to achieving the programme's aims.

The LCA has been offered in the school since 1997 and its co-ordination is an assistant principal's post of responsibility. In the school, the programme is targeted at students with SEN, and used as a means to provide support to these students through their senior cycle. Care must be taken by the school to ensure that the programme is also seen as a realistic option for those students who simply do not want to, or believe themselves unable to benefit from the established Leaving Certificate programme.

There was no evidence provided of a plan for LCA during the whole-school evaluation visit. It is essential that planning activities are carried out, documented and implemented for all programmes within the school. Reports of any meetings of LCA teachers also need to be documented and maintained with the programme plan.

In the staff room, a dedicated LCA notice board provides information for teachers, and students are kept informed by means of an LCA notice board outside the co-ordinator's office. The co-ordinator maintains close contact with LCA students through timetabled lessons spread throughout the week with each of the class groups.

Following an LCA programme evaluation in May 2009, the establishment of a core planning team for LCA, that would meet periodically to discuss ongoing issues and to disseminate information in a systematic way, was recommended. It was reported during the whole-school evaluation process that a core planning team had been formed. A root-and-branch review of the LCA programme in the school, which would include input from senior management, teachers on the programme, students and their parents was also recommended. No information was made available during the whole-school evaluation on the implementation of this recommendation.

The report on the LCA programme evaluation recommended that, in order to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, the full LCA programme, including elective modules, should be provided in the school. At the time of the whole-school evaluation, no elective modules were being offered on the programme. However, in information received later in the evaluation process, it was reported that a meeting of the core planning group decided to make Science an elective for the school year 2010-11, subject to resource availability.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

First-year students are asked to choose their subject options prior to entering the school. While it is recognised that information is available to assist students and their parents, it is suggested that consideration be given to introducing a sampling programme during which students could experience subject options prior to choosing which ones to continue to study for junior cycle. Currently Science and French are not offered to all class groups at junior cycle. The restrictions this can place on students' options on leaving school are significant and therefore this practice should be reviewed.

Students entering senior cycle are initially given free choice of subject options. From this information the school arranges four option bands, maximising the availability of subjects for each student. Students are then asked to choose one subject from each band. These arrangements are appropriate.

Parents are involved in subject options through information nights offered prior to enrolment in first year and towards the end of third year. A separate information session takes place for parents of students who have opted for LCA. It is recommended that the information night for parents of third-year students would include information on LCA, informing the general body of parents prior to programme choices being made. More detailed information on LCA could then be provided to parents in a distinct session early in the first year of the programme. An information booklet is provided to students and parents towards the end of junior cycle on subject choices and their implications for further study and/or careers, in line with good practice.

Arrangements for participation in JCSP are appropriate. The JCSP core team identifies and selects students following their attendance for a number of weeks at the school. The selection of students is revisited on a regular basis and students can be moved into and out of the JCSP as their circumstances change.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

The board of management expressed its satisfaction with the range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer in the school and acknowledged the commitment of teachers in these areas. Representatives of the parents' council articulated their satisfaction regarding the good range of activities available to students. There was evidence that organised activities such as the school musical show and the World Cup football competition play an important role in promoting interculturalism and promoting multi-national mixing between students in the school.

Much of the extracurricular provision for junior-cycle students is organised and funded under the School Completion Programme. This has included guitar lessons, drum lessons, hip-hop dance, yoga and Futsol. The student council expressed regret that such activities are only available to junior students. At the time of the inspection the school musical show had just taken place. The enthusiasm and excitement generated by the show was still in evidence, underlining the importance of such activities in the life of the school.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

A good collaborative spirit and collegial support prevails within subject departments. In some instances teachers have recently begun to post and share resources online, using SharePoint. In all cases a subject co-ordinator is in place and the good practice of rotating this role amongst members of the department was evident.

School management supports the planning process by providing time for formal planning, and informal meetings between teachers take place frequently. In almost all cases minutes of department meetings are maintained. This should be extended to all subject areas and copies of these minutes should be provided to senior management. It is noteworthy that collaboration is taking place between subject departments, for example between the English department and the educational supports department and between the technologies teaching team and the art department.

Subject department plans provided to inspectors covered organisation, planning, delivery and assessment for the subjects involved. Best practice was observed where learning outcomes were linked with the content to be taught, the teaching methodologies and the resources to be used to support teaching, learning and assessment. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all subject areas.

Planning and preparation by individual teachers for all of the lessons observed was of a very high standard. All teachers were well prepared for class and there was evidence of effective planning for learning. A wide range of resources was prepared by teachers to support teaching and learning. Lessons were set within the context of a wider scheme of work and were in line with the subject department plans and syllabus requirements.

4.2 Learning and teaching

All lessons visited by inspectors had clear objectives. Good practice was observed where these were explicitly stated at the beginning of the lesson. It is recommended that all teachers, in all subjects, explicitly share the lesson objectives with students, establishing a clear sense of purpose from the outset and focusing students' attention.

Teachers used a variety of methodologies, often with a good balance between whole-class activities and small group or individual activities. Good practice was observed where a differentiated approach to teaching was adopted. It is recommended that all teachers plan for and implement such an approach.

There were some examples of the very good use of material resources including ICT, photographs and newspaper accounts, to support teaching and learning. All teachers are reminded of the value of such resources in enhancing students' learning experiences. To support students' understanding, lists of key words were often displayed or recorded on the whiteboard. This practice should be adopted in all lessons as a support for students, particularly those with SEN or those for whom English is an additional language.

Students were encouraged to actively participate in classroom activities and most showed enthusiasm for the work being undertaken. A respectful and supportive learning environment was created in classrooms with students' efforts being acknowledged and affirmed.

In some subjects inspected, students demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding, including knowledge of previous learning, correct subject terminology, and subject-specific skills acquisition. There were examples of the very good use of questioning and investigation to develop students' higher-order thinking skills and to advance their understanding of concepts. In one subject area it was reported that teachers could have higher expectations for their students, particularly at junior cycle. It is recommended that

all subject departments reflect on their planning and practices to ensure that targets set for students' attainment are as high as realistically possible.

4.3 Assessment

A range of assessment methods is used to monitor students' progress. These include oral questioning during lessons, project work and end-of-topic tests. Teachers' attention is drawn to the need to differentiate questions to ensure that students at all levels of ability are appropriately challenged and affirmed.

In line with good practice, there is a school homework policy in place and in most of the subjects evaluated, homework was set and monitored regularly. To underline the important part homework plays in the learning process and in supporting the work done in school, it is important that it is allocated and corrected regularly in all subject areas. Inspectors noted that the nature of the feedback provided to students on their homework varied from acknowledgement of completion of work, to brief affirming comments. It is recommended that teachers should optimise the opportunities presented by homework to acknowledge students' strengths and to provide them with clear, constructive, advice for improvement. Subject departments are encouraged to access the assessment for learning section of the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (www.ncca.ie) for support in this area.

Good procedures for summative assessments are in place. All students sit formal examinations at Christmas; first-year, second-year and fifth-year students sit examinations at the end of the summer term; and third-year and sixth-year classes take 'mock' examinations in the spring. In some subjects, the very good practice of setting common examination papers takes place. It is recommended that all subject departments consider the benefits of implementing this practice in their own subject areas. It is further recommended that end-of-term examinations reflect the full range of assessment activities associated with the certificate examinations, including oral proficiency and practical or project work.

In line with accepted practice, learning statements and student profiles are used to record the progress of JCSP students through their courses. LCA students complete key assignments on conclusion of each of the four modules of that programme.

Teachers maintain records of students' attendance, homework and class tests. Student progress is communicated to parents following formal examinations and at parent-teacher meetings scheduled annually for each year group. The student diary is used by teachers to communicate with individual parents.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

Documentation provided indicates that the educational support team includes ten special needs assistants (SNAs), two qualified support teachers – one of whom acts as co-ordinator – and twenty mainstream subject teachers. A majority of the mainstream teachers have either one or two timetabled periods per week of educational support. It is recommended that a smaller team of mainstream teachers be selected to provide educational support. This would enable more extended contact with students, would build up more significant expertise and would provide a more continuous and stable learning experience for students with special educational needs.

The school's three educational support rooms are equipped with a small number of computers for student use and one for the use of the teacher. The room assigned to the co-ordinator contains folders of resources and a filing cabinet for student files. It is important that this filing cabinet be kept locked, particularly when the room is occupied by other classes and teachers. Good team work is facilitated by the timetabling of a weekly meeting between the two qualified educational supports teachers, the guidance counsellor and the deputy principal. Additionally, at meetings of the English department, which includes many of the educational supports teachers, issues for teaching students with special educational needs are addressed.

The role of co-ordinator of educational supports, as documented, is well defined and includes timetabling learning support provision, assigning SNAs, preparing applications for additional resources, promoting inclusive practices and co-ordinating new initiatives.

The school operates an effective system to identify students' special educational needs, which includes the two-way sharing of information with parents and feeder primary schools, entrance assessment tests, teacher or parent referrals and school examinations. The current model of intervention used to address identified needs consists of individual or small group learning-support or resource tuition, sometimes on a withdrawal basis. As this model has been in place in the school for a significant period of time, it would now be appropriate for strategies to be reviewed with a view to introducing additional models of support, for example, team teaching.

A school policy on special educational needs (SEN) was developed in 2008. One of the stated aims of the learning support department is to ensure that every student is given the opportunity to achieve a functional level of literacy. It is suggested that, in light of the wide range of abilities of students with SEN, expectations of achievement should be higher. The policy now requires updating to reflect the ongoing changes occurring in the school. Specifically, it should refer to the comprehensive Co. Meath VEC policy on SEN as well as to exceptionally able students, in line with the definition of special educational needs in the Education Act, 1998,

There is a strong focus on literacy support in the school with numeracy support being less well developed. It is recommended that a whole-school numeracy strategy be developed and put in place.

The room dedicated to English language support is bright and welcoming, with colourful displays of posters, key words and maps. A bilingual story project has recently been completed in partnership with a local primary school. However, due to the high numbers of EAL students in the school, English language support is the responsibility of all subject teachers. To assist non-specialist teachers in this regard, the EAL department makes resources available to all teachers.

The EAL plan indicates a school policy on assessing every EAL student's English language ability and offering support based on the results of the assessment. However, there is a concern within the school that reduced resources will affect the continuation of this good practice.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Facilities in the school for Guidance are very good. The guidance counsellor, who is full time, has an office which is equipped with a telephone, computer with internet access, secure storage and shelving. There is a careers library stocked with up-to-date college prospectuses, and hard copy and digital information on careers and courses. The careers library is accessible by arrangement with the guidance counsellor and students may explore

career options on site or borrow materials to take home. Consideration should be given to establishing a team of senior students who would supervise the use of the careers library at lunchtimes, thereby increasing access for students to this very valuable resource. Adjoining the library is a guidance computer room. The twenty-four computer terminals situated here are all equipped with Qualifax software and used for careers exploration with senior students.

Following the formation of a dedicated planning task group that met through the 2005/06 school year, a guidance plan was drawn up. The plan still needs to be circulated among the wider school community and to the board of management for consultation and ratification. It is recommended this happens without delay.

Both of the school's LCA classes are scheduled two periods per week of Vocational Preparation with the guidance counsellor. It is recommended that sixth-year classes following the established Leaving Certificate programme also be given weekly access to guidance class. Five hours and forty minutes of the Guidance allocation to the school is currently assigned to the four PLC programmes. This focus on providing Guidance to this sector of the school community is good practice.

Arrangements for individual appointments with the guidance counsellor are informal. It would be in line with good practice for specific times of the week to be set aside for this purpose and for those times to be communicated to students and to school management. In this way, the guidance counsellor's week is more structured and clarity is provided around students' and parents' access to this service.

The guidance plan indicates that Guidance is a key area in the school, making contributions in the areas of general student care, student assessment, applications and allocations to class groups, subject and programme choice, interventions for students with SEN, student induction, options on leaving school, "Business in the Community" and access programmes for third-level education.

There is a very wide range of student care structures in place in the school. A student care team, with membership from senior management, behaviour support, guidance, school completion, home school community liaison and SPHE is well established in the school. The team, that brings together a range of expertise, meets weekly to identify students in difficulty and to discuss integrated support strategies. Recently it began operating a system whereby individual team members take responsibility for named students, ensuring that discussion always leads to action. The care team also arranges meetings with external personnel involved in the care of students and actively sought involvement in Jigsaw, a community project with a focus on mental health. It was reported that Jigsaw had successfully provided a structure through which all the support strands already operating in the school were connected. It would now be appropriate that a whole-school care policy be developed, documenting the many strands of student care and enunciating a policy for staff care. The task group formed to complete this work should be led by the care team and include representatives of school staff, school management, parents and students.

The School Completion Programme supports students not only through the provision of extracurricular activities as mentioned in section 3.3 of this report but also in many other ways. It provides funding for the book rental scheme, operates the Youth Café and runs the homework club. The Youth Café, open to all students but targeting disadvantaged students, offers breakfast in the mornings and snacks at lunchtime and at the homework club. Board games are also made available in the café at lunchtimes, supporting the development of students' social skills.

The school has had the services of a home school community liaison co-ordinator for ten years and her enthusiasm for the work involved is still evident. Supporting parents through activities, courses, meetings and home visits, a wide range of initiatives has been put in place over the years. The co-ordinator meets with the principal at the beginning of each week to share and update information. In addition, strong links are maintained with external agencies, local area HSCL co-ordinators, and with the other support structures within the school. "Multicultural Week", during which parents and students are targeted for support in sharing the customs and traditions of their country of origin, is organised each year during the second term by the HSCL co-ordinator.

The process of transition from primary school is suitably supported through an induction day for incoming students. Students get the chance to meet key staff members, to meet each other, to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings and with new rules. Activities and lunch funded by the SCP form an important part of the day. The transition booklet produced for incoming first years is student-friendly in language and presentation, is practical, and it assists these students in reflecting on their move to post-primary school.

The school operates a behaviour support classroom, known as Dóchas. Targeted students are provided with intensive individualised intervention programmes with the aim of improving behaviour and increasing the sense of identification with the school community. The classroom is staffed by one whole-time teacher who acts as co-ordinator and two half-time teachers, two of whom have backgrounds in student support. The co-ordinator and one other team member who met with the inspection team expressed their belief in the potential and actual success of the support classroom interventions and their commitment and enthusiasm were evident. The team meets regularly and also links in with other support structures in the school, notably SCP and HSCL, as well as with the whole staff.

A school strategy team that includes support service personnel, the support classroom co-ordinator, the deputy principal, a teacher representative and two year heads has been formed and meets approximately four times in the year. This team contributes to the Dóchas plan, which includes the possibility of extending support into senior cycle from next year and the implementation of a greater number of whole school support strategies. These initiatives are evidence of how a vibrant team approach can provide support to teaching staff as well as to targeted students.

Members of the student council who met with inspectors spoke of Beaufort College as having a friendly school atmosphere and being a place where everyone talks to everyone else, where there is little bullying, where there are no separate ethnic groups and where teachers are very approachable.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Quality learning and teaching is promoted in the school and teachers are encouraged by senior management to reflect on their practices in a changing school environment.
- The school library, a JCSP Demonstration Library, is highly impressive with its wide range of resources and equipment. The library is managed by a full-time qualified librarian who is very clear about its purpose and value. It contains a comprehensive ICT library to support teachers' CPD and there is student access to computer, printing and scanning facilities.

- The school building is in pristine condition thanks to the work of the excellent maintenance and cleaning team. This helps to establish a quality environment that supports quality education.
- The school plan is a comprehensive file; the permanent section has been carefully prepared and it contains a mix of information and numerical data.
- Subject department planning has had a significant impact on teaching and learning, encouraging collaboration, the sharing of resources and the development of common tests by some teachers. Subject department plans were generally indicative of healthy engagement with the planning process.
- The school's provision for SPHE exceeds Department requirements and indicates the importance placed by school management on students' personal development.
- JCSP students, who are identified and selected following their attendance for a number of weeks at the school, are fully integrated into all aspects of school life. Students can be moved into and out of the JCSP as their circumstances change.
- A good collaborative spirit and collegial support prevails within subject departments. Subject plans have been prepared, the best of which link learning outcomes with the content to be taught, the teaching methodologies and the resources to be used to support teaching, learning and assessment.
- Planning and preparation by individual teachers for all of the lessons observed was of a very high standard. All teachers were well prepared for class and there was evidence of effective planning for learning. The wide range of resources prepared by teachers to support teaching and learning was impressive.
- There were examples of the very good use of questioning and investigation to develop students' higher-order thinking skills and to advance their understanding of concepts.
- Good procedures for summative assessments are in place and in some subjects the very good practice of setting common examination papers is in place.
- The school operates an effective system to identify students' special educational needs, which includes the two-way sharing of information with parents and feeder primary schools, entrance assessment tests, teacher or parent referrals and school examinations.
- There is a very wide range of student care structures in place in the school. A student care team, that brings together a range of expertise, is well established in the school. The team meets weekly to identify students in difficulty and to discuss integrated support strategies.
- The process of transition from primary school is suitably supported through an induction day for incoming students and a student-friendly transition booklet.

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

- There is a small number of permanent whole-time staff currently not fulfilling the minimum requirement of eighteen hours' class contact time as required by Department regulations. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible.
- A planning steering group, led by the planning co-ordinator, should be established to oversee the school's planning processes. The steering group should play an active role in the development and ongoing progress of all task groups, who should work to agreed timeframes.
- The DEIS action plan for the three-year cycle 2009-2012, under development at the time of the inspection, should be completed as soon as possible.
- LCA planning activities should be documented and reports of any meetings of LCA teachers maintained with the programme plan. A root-and-branch review of the LCA programme in the school, as recommended following the programme

evaluation of May 2009 is again recommended. The review should include input from senior management, teachers on the programme, students and their parents.

- The practice of not offering Science and French to all class groups at junior cycle should be reviewed, given the significant restrictions this can place on students' options on leaving school.
- All teachers, in all subjects, should explicitly share the lesson objectives with students, establishing a clear sense of purpose from the outset of lessons and focusing students' attention.
- An appropriately small team of mainstream teachers to provide educational support to students with special educational needs should be identified. This is necessary to enable teachers to have significant weekly contact with students, to build up expertise and to provide a continuous and more stable learning experience for students with SEN.
- It is recommended that a whole school numeracy strategy be developed and put in place.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with in-school senior management, with a small number of the teaching staff and with the 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 English – 24 February 2010
- Subject Inspection of Geography – 13 February 2010
- Subject Inspection of Irish – 29 September 2009
- Subject Inspection of Materials Technology (Wood) and Construction Studies – 24 February 2010

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Appendix

8. SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board congratulates the inspection team on their rigour, commitment and professionalism.

The Board accepts the content of the report but notes that due to industrial action at the time of the report full access to LCA documentation was not available.

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 is addressing all of the recommendations and has instructed the principal to work with senior management and teachers to implement the recommendations during the current school year and to report back to the Board on progress at regular intervals.