

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta  
Department of Education and Science

Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT

Castleknock College  
Castleknock, Dublin 15  
Roll number: 60100Q

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## This Whole School Evaluation report

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Castleknock College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school's board of governors, and representatives of the parents' association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and interacted with the class teachers. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of governors. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

### **Introduction**

Castleknock College is a fee-paying voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Vincentian Community. Founded in 1835, the school operated solely as a boarding school until 1987. Since then it has catered for both boarding and day students. This current academic year is the final year in which boarders will be represented within the student body. From September 2006 the school will cater for day students only.

The school is located in its own extensive grounds and currently comprises three separate buildings, two accommodating classrooms and one other currently housing the boarding students, school administration and the members of the Vincentian Community. The school is at present undertaking a significant building development programme that will result in the amalgamation of classrooms and school administration into one main building. Work has commenced on the project following significant fundraising activities undertaken by the school community in preparation for the redevelopment.

The school has a current enrolment of 574 boys and the pattern of overall enrolment has remained stable over the past number of years. As the school is fee-paying, students come from largely middle class communities in a diversity of areas including the local area Dublin 15, Dublin West, Meath, Kildare and South Dublin. This pattern of enrolment was used in the determination of the school's admission policy, which was reviewed to reflect the change to day only provision. In addition, the number of international students within the school's intake has also declined as the boarding provision has been phased out.

The school has considerable outdoor sports facilities including 9 pitches that are predominantly used for the school's major sporting activity of rugby. Other facilities available include tennis courts and an indoor sports hall.

Students participate in the Junior Certificate programme at junior cycle and the Established Leaving Certificate programme at senior cycle. Participation in the Transition Year (TY) programme is mandatory for all senior cycle students.

### **1. The quality of School Management**

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

Castleknock College has clearly articulated mission and ethos statements that are disseminated widely among all members of the school's community.

The crucial criterion in evaluating the characteristic spirit of the school is not the content of the mission statement itself but the extent to which it is manifested in the day-to-day activities in the school. During the evaluation it was clear that the members of the school's community are clear about the mission and philosophy of the school, in particular its focus on recognising and fostering of the talents and abilities of individual students. Students are addressed individually by name, even by staff members not directly involved in their academic instruction. The requirement of students to participate in sporting activities is met through the provision of a wide range of options that allow individuals to choose at least one activity that suits their own abilities and interests.

A key factor determining the long-term success of the school has been its adherence to its philosophy and aims. The changes of in the past twenty years in moving from boarding to day provision and the commencement of the school redevelopment programme have been guided by the core ideology with emphasis placed on ensuring that the change will not compromise the school's core principles. This will be a key factor in ensuring that the school remains widely recognised and continues to make significant positive impact on the lives of its students, present and past.

## **1.2 School ownership and management**

Castleknock College is a catholic school, which operates within the trusteeship of the Vincentian Congregation. The school is governed by a 12-member board of governors whose functions are set out in its constitution agreed in 1998. The Provincial of the Order, after consultation with the college President and the Chairperson of the board, makes all appointments to the board.

The board has not been constituted as a board as outlined in section 14(1) of the Education Act 1998. It was stated that notice of the intention to establish a board of management had been given, within the context of the congregation's new trustee arrangements for its schools, to the Department of Education and Science, and this is to be welcomed.

The board is well informed of its functions, responsibilities and statutory obligations. A high level of awareness exists among board members of the developments in education legislation and its impact for the management of schools. The board has two committees, Finance and Education, to assist in advising it. The Finance Committee is the more active of these as is expected in the context of the ongoing building and re-development programme. The recent re-establishment of the Education Committee is welcome, as it should ensure that teaching and learning objectives are also prioritised in the context of the school's development.

The board is highly effective within the role outlined for it in its constitution. It enjoys a close supportive relationship with senior management. The quality of the strategic planning process of the board is excellent and is best evidenced in its work in planning for the redevelopment of the school's buildings and facilities. This project has meant that a considerable amount of the board's time has been devoted to discussion around this issue.

A parents' forum exists for each of the year groups in the college. These fora meet regularly and their work is co-ordinated by both the principal and a post holder within the school's teaching staff. From these fora the Parents' Representative Association is formed. A recent trial by the association of a text alert system for parents is a good indication of how the association works towards improving systems of communication between the school and parents. In the longer term the development of this system could be linked to school attendance systems.

The parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the school at its educational provision. In particular, the school's support for the development of individual skills, interests and abilities was stressed. Many of the parents had more than one child attending the school although it was reported that sons of past men represent a very small percentage of the student intake.

The day-to-day management structure of Castleknock College is similar to that operating in other fee-paying secondary schools. The Provincial of the Vincentian Congregation appoints the college President. The President sits on the board and is active in the promotion of the mission and ethos of the order in the life of the school. While primarily concerned with the spiritual dimension of the role the senior management of the school is fortunate in the level of operational support given by the President to the school. This includes teaching duties in addition to administrative and technical support. The President also provides support and advice to the Headmaster, the title normally given to the school's principal.

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

The principal is well acquainted with staff and students and is strongly committed to ensuring that the mission and ethos of the school are maintained. The principal accords considerable importance to ensuring that students and parents actively and positively accept and support the mission and ethos of the school and, to this end, is very much involved in the interview process for the admissions of new students. In addition, the principal has considerable hands-on involvement in the extensive redevelopment programme. This commitment of the principal to this task has been possible because of the support and hard work of the relatively recently appointed deputy principal who takes a great deal of responsibility with respect to the day-to-day management of the school.

As the senior management team, the principal and deputy principal give considerable time and effort to the school. They are involved in and present at most extra-curricular events. Despite daily interaction, the current location of the offices of principal and deputy principal in the administration and teaching buildings respectively makes it difficult to set aside dedicated meeting time for the team to review operational matters. There is also need to review the role descriptors of the senior management team to reflect the elimination of functions vis-à-vis boarders. This would provide an opportunity to review the relationship between the principal and deputy principal with respect to the management of the day-to-day activities of the school and the management of teaching and learning.

Assistant Principals and Special Duties Teachers have a broad range of roles within the school and detailed descriptors are available outlining the range of tasks associated with each post. Review of the continued appropriateness of the school's in-school management arrangements appears to be confined to when vacancies arise, although it may be undertaken between the board, principal and teaching staff of the school at 2-year intervals as outlined in section 2.14 Circular Letter PPT 29/02. The inconsistency in language use within descriptors e.g. Deputy Principal/Headmaster and/or Prefect of Studies should be addressed.

Management support is centred mainly on the meetings of two groups, the Administration Committee Meeting and the meeting of the internal administrative group including the President, principal and deputy principal and the school's administrator, which focuses on financial and budgetary matters. The Administration Committee Meeting is the main forum for post holders to meet. The meeting has a formalised agenda and the school secretary keeps the minutes thereby facilitating members to engage with the agenda items. Much of the business of the meeting is concerned with discussing the progress of class groups, particularly relating to disciplinary matters. During the evaluation it was evident that all groups were chaired by the principal and in his absence by the deputy principal. Consideration should be given to delegating this function to members of the middle management team, as this will foster collaboration and delegation throughout the in-school management team.

There is need to develop greater awareness among the post holders of their role as part of the in-school management team. While role descriptors clearly state this, the task focus of the posts means that there is little opportunity or impetus for post-holders to engage with whole school review and development planning. There is much skill and goodwill among post holders to engage in discussion and action in relation to development planning, especially planning with a focus on teaching and learning. This will also assist in the development of professional and

personal competences among staff which may be valuable should they wish to move into senior management.

Good communication with parents is encouraged at all levels within the school and parents stressed the availability of individual teachers to meet and discuss their sons' progress. This is to be commended.

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

The deficiencies in the school's accommodation have long been recognised and the school's trustees and management are to be commended for the excellent work they are currently undertaking to re-develop the school. This project involves considerable fund-raising activities in addition to the organisational requirements associated with continuity of educational provision during the project. There are good facilities for students who avail of the school's canteen and a separate room for those who chose to bring their own lunch to school. The school's maintenance team were visible during class time cleaning the corridors and shared areas. There is however evidence of litter in common areas and there is scope for improving awareness among students of the need to treat the school facilities with care.

The school library is currently located in temporary accommodation pending the completion of the building programme. Despite the limitation of reduced space, the library has an atmosphere conducive to reading and study. It is well stocked and students are encouraged by subject departments, particularly English, to use the facilities to support teaching and learning. The involvement of the library staff in extra-curricular provision and in the provision of supervised study is an additional resource that the school uses to good effect. There are few computers available in the current arrangement and it is suggested that the future development of the library should include development of its ICT facilities alongside the planned multimedia library.

During the inspection visit the inspectors drew attention to ensuring adherence to the school's health and safety policy regarding access to windows on the upper floors of the boarders' accommodation. The supervision of students on corridors at break times, in particular around the locker areas, has been a concern within the school community that has been addressed in the first instance through the installation of CCTV on the main link corridors. A review of the appropriate placement of lockers should also be undertaken with priority given to the placement of first year student lockers within the context of the new school facilities.

Though Castleknock College is a fee-paying school, the Department of Education and Science provides the salaries for the majority of teaching posts with the college funding additional teaching posts and five administrative staff. The school's management is fortunate in the level of administrative support available to it, particularly with respect to financial management and liaison with past students. In these areas, the school compares favourably to schools in the public sector.

Teachers are generally deployed across both junior and senior cycle, an important factor in the context of teachers' professional development. The school makes every effort to match the teachers' qualifications with the subjects they teach. The profile of the teaching staff has changed over the past number of years, providing both opportunities and challenges for the school. Among the challenges are the need to develop communication and cohesion among teachers and between teachers and senior management, particularly with regard to maintaining the school's characteristic spirit. Some progress has been made in this area despite the physical dispersal of teachers between the two buildings. There was also some evidence of mentoring of newer teaching staff by established teachers in subject departments.

The board has been supportive of staff development through providing support for those undertaking further study, the outcomes of which often contribute to policy development within the

school. There is also funding for active membership of subject associations though it was evident that not all teachers availed of this.

## **2. Quality of School Planning**

The school has undergone significant change over the past twenty years in the transition from boarding to day provision. At an organisational level this has required considerable planning and organisation. The trustees, board and school management have worked closely to ensure a smooth transition with positive outcomes that ensures that the changes are in keeping with the school's characteristic spirit.

The development of a long-term strategy that focused on the student profile and building programme demonstrates the evolution of planning processes and structures within the school. To support these developments, and meet the requirements of education legislation, the board has focused on the development of specific policies including admissions and health and safety. A review was also undertaken on behalf of the board as an initial step in the school development planning process that identified areas for development. The work to date has focused on the development of policies previously mentioned.

The documentation of these policies is of good quality. At least in one instance this documentation benefits from the school's ability to involve external contractors in its preparation and presentation. However, the lack of involvement of the whole school community in their preparation is a weakness, despite, as was stated, the opportunities presented to both parents and teachers to comment on their content. The school has made some limited progress in developing internal processes for continuous review of its work. Examples were given of how the TY co-ordination team sought the views of parents on their experience of the programme and how that information might be used to introduce changes.

Using these policies and experience, attention should now focus on the compilation of an overall school development plan. This plan should prioritise and monitor the objectives for improvement at whole school level. The objectives and priorities should be clear and time bound and care must be taken to ensure that in the context of the building programme those objectives and priorities that focus on teaching and learning are not forgotten. It is commendable that the Education sub-committee of the board has been reconstituted with this in mind. The work of this committee will be further strengthened through the involvement of the whole school community, including teachers and parents, as it progresses.

In developing the school's planning process considerable emphasis should be placed on the development of the role of the post holders as part of the in-school management team. It is appropriate that the middle management group should play a more active role in the school development planning process. Inspectors generally reported that subject planning was progressing well in the school. This indicates the capacity of the middle management team to contribute positively to the development of the school plan. It will be important that the plan becomes a basis for harnessing the collective experience of the staff as they review and evaluate the school's provision and set out appropriate action plans for school improvement.

The school has perhaps not made sufficient use of the support of the School Development Planning Initiative to meet the needs of the staff with respect to planning at a whole school level. While progress has been made at subject level, there is scope for the development of whole school approaches at this stage.

Evidence was provided to confirm that the board of governors and staff have taken appropriate steps to develop policies in line with the provisions in Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, 2004) and Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Department of Education and Science,

September 2004). A designated liaison person has been appointed in line with the requirements of the Departmental guidelines.

### **3. Quality of Curriculum Provision**

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

Tradition is the main factor determining the curriculum provision in the school. At junior cycle all students follow the Junior Certificate programme and at senior cycle the Established Leaving Certificate programme. The Transition Year (TY) programme is mandatory for all students and has recently been reviewed as part of the school's planning processes. It is evident from the contributions of parents and the board during the evaluation that the school community are satisfied that the current curriculum provision meets the needs of students attending the school.

The school's resources for ICT have recently been upgraded and it is planned that they will continue to improve in the context of the school's building plan. Formal classes are provided for students of TY and first year students only. These classes focus on developing basic computer literacy and on completion of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) as a means of embedding and extending ICT skills. There is scope for improving the effectiveness of curriculum provision for ICT across the school. In the context of school planning it is advised that the school reviews how to optimise the use of the available resources, both to develop students' ICT capabilities and to support teaching and learning across other subjects.

A review of the school timetable indicated that the total weekly instruction time is below the minimum recommended time of 28 hours. The school's management is advised to adhere to the terms of the Time in School Circular Letter M29/95.

As a rule teachers are assigned to subjects based on their qualifications and experience. In general classes are of mixed ability and therefore teachers have an opportunity to teach the full range of student abilities. However, there is some evidence that on occasion there is a lack of rotation across year groups of teachers within subject areas. In the main, time allocation to subjects, particularly optional subjects, is good, with classes spread through the week. There is however an inconsistency in the time allocated to 'core' subjects at junior cycle with some clustering of lessons within the week. It is recommended that practice across subjects is consistent and that there is a spread of class contact time through the week, particularly in the case of Junior Certificate English.

All students complete the Transition Year (TY) programme and considerable attention has been paid to the preparation of the overall programme including the modular programme and co-curricular activities. As a consequence of the range of activities that students complete as part of the programme, it is apparent that the number of out-of-school activities in which students are engaged can disrupt formal teaching time. The programme focuses on personal and academic development. However, the subject inspections carried out identified scope for the development of TY modular programmes within subject areas which make a greater distinction in content and learning experiences between TY and the Leaving Certificate programme. Examples were also given by inspectors of how modular programmes could strengthen links with the local community.

The majority of teachers are classroom-based in one of two buildings, Dowley or Cregan House. This means that students move between classrooms between class periods. During the evaluation and following a review of the school timetable, it is evident that movement of students between buildings for classes is not restricted to break and lunch times and as a consequence there is a loss of instruction time in follow-on classes. This situation can be very disruptive for both students and teachers. This is particularly difficult for first years making the transition from primary to post-primary school. While this situation will be partially resolved by the new

development, it is recommended that in the interim first year class groups be assigned designated classrooms based in one of the two existing houses, preferably Dowley House.

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

While the curriculum provision of the school is largely traditional and based on previous practice, it is equally accessible to all students. In junior cycle, provision centres on a large core of mandatory subjects including one modern European language, Science and, more recently, Business Studies. This means that there is very little variation in the range of subjects taken by junior cycle students. Although students are able to choose two additional options from a range including Art and Music, technological subjects are not offered either in junior or senior cycle. A good number of students enter the school having availed of the exemption from the teaching of Irish. It is expected that this number will decrease, as non-Irish boarders will no longer be part of the school's population and the school is advised to review this figure over the short to medium term as it has implications for class size and allocation.

While the curriculum provision is narrow, the school works effectively towards ensuring that there is continuity between provision in junior and senior cycle. For example in the case of science and business, all three senior cycle subjects in these areas are provided.

The situation with respect to technological subjects will not change, as the building redevelopment makes no provision for the inclusion of technology rooms. Management and parents seem satisfied that this decision is consistent with the needs and interests of students attending the school. However, this decision will limit the school's capacity to offer these subjects in the future and careful consideration should be given to ensuring that this is in the long-term interests of the school's prospective students.

In junior cycle, incoming first years and their parents make the optional subject selections following an evening presentation by the principal and Guidance counsellor. Subject teachers are not directly involved in this process and consideration should be given to either including brief presentations from subject teachers at this meeting or to the compilation by subject co-ordinators of an information booklet for distribution to parents with descriptors of subjects. This model or one similar to that existing in TY could also be applied in senior cycle where there is more optional choice available to students.

As most students progress to higher education on completion of the Leaving Certificate, emphasis is placed on ensuring that students are made aware of college entry requirements in advance of subject selection in senior cycle. In addition, while guidance is provided in relation to subjects suitable for further courses, students are encouraged to make subject selections based on interests and abilities.

Senior cycle subject selection is determined by student preference. Considerable work goes into accommodating the subject choices of students and this is achieved in nearly every case. The school is to be commended for its efforts in this regard. In addition, if a sufficient number of students indicate a preference to take Classical Studies or Applied Mathematics, these subjects are provided outside of formal school time. This provision is greatly appreciated by parents. If this pattern is to continue, and it is determined that students would prefer to include these subjects as one of their three main options rather than as an additional eighth subject for examination purposes, then every effort should be made to accommodate the subjects within the formal optional choices provided within school time.

In junior cycle all classes are of mixed ability with banding introduced for the core subjects of Irish and Mathematics in second year and in third year in the case of English. In senior cycle, Irish, English, Mathematics and French are taught in higher and ordinary classes, but movement is facilitated between levels provided it is in the best interests of the student.

In the case of SPHE, specific timetabled provision was only evident in certain year groups and it was reported that specific learning outcomes of the SPHE programme were being incorporated into other subject areas including Physical Education. It is important in this context that the SPHE plan clearly sets out the approach to be taken, the individual areas of responsibility and a system for monitoring and reviewing the attainment of the learning outcomes of the programme.

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

The curriculum is enriched by the provision of a wide range of learning opportunities outside the classroom. This is a particular strength of the school's provision and one that provides a very good example of how the school endeavours to live out its characteristic spirit. While provision of extra-curricular activities is usually strong in boarding schools, the school has made very good efforts to continue this tradition as the boarding aspect of the school's provision has been phased out. All students are required to engage in a sporting activity, but in recognition of the fact that the school's main extra-curricular sporting activities may not suit all students' interests and abilities, a wide range of activities is made available to students.

The school is traditionally known for its involvement in rugby and, while this is undoubtedly the major focus of team sports, the school also provides soccer, Gaelic football, tennis and on occasion cricket. Seasonally, it also provides a programme in track and field that involves external interschool competitions and culminates in an in-house sports day. The TY programme also provides an opportunity for involvement in non-traditional sports activities that are offered as part of the modular programme, sometimes at an additional monetary cost to the students.

In addition to sporting activities, the school has a tradition of provision of cultural and aesthetic activities, particularly as part of its co-curricular provision. Many of these activities, for example, the senior debating society's annual gold medal debate, are long established. Teachers give considerable attention to organising and maintaining continuity of these events and activities that so enrich the curriculum. Co-curricular activities are strongest in the areas of language and humanities and include emphasis on drama and music. It is desirable that recent efforts to increase involvement in other areas including science and business are maintained.

The annual awards ceremony that takes place on the school's Union Day is widely valued by parents, students and teachers. This is an excellent mechanism for recognising student academic, sporting and personal achievement.

## **4. Quality of Learning and Teaching in Subjects**

### **4.1 Planning and Preparation**

Subject areas in Castleknock College benefit from the establishment of formal subject department structures. These structures have enabled the development of a culture of subject planning involving both review and forward planning. The role of subject co-ordinator is removed from the post of responsibility structure and the school's senior management appoints the co-ordinator. It is recommended that the role of co-ordinator rotate within subject areas at a regular interval of at most three academic years. Each subject department has regular meetings facilitated by school management. These meetings have an agenda and the minutes are recorded. In most cases the principal or deputy principal attends the meeting but this is not altogether necessary, as good practice exists with respect to recording meeting outcomes.

Some subject departments are at a more advanced stage of subject planning than others though yearly schemes were available in all areas. In some cases the plans detailed desired learning outcomes, matched resources with lesson content, and made reference to appropriate teaching methodologies. In all cases, it is recommended that, in the context of the opportunity presented

by the new facilities, the plans take into account the impact of the additional resources available and how ICT should be integrated within subject areas.

Planning at the individual teacher level is very good with appropriate resources selected and used within lessons. Prepared handouts were used and in some instances detailed individual lesson plans were available. Classroom materials and resources were generally good. There is scope to apply on a needs basis to the school's management for funding for additional resources.

#### **4.2 Teaching and Learning**

The general quality of teaching is good. Lessons typically are structured with the purpose outlined at the start, which focuses student attention. Classroom atmosphere is positive and conducive to learning with appropriate materials and resources introduced to support the achievement of learning outcomes.

In English and History there were some imaginative examples of the use of additional resources. While students responded well to these strategies, further support could be given through reflection and writing, to help students to understand and record what they have learnt. Lessons usually follow a pattern in which the teacher begins by reviewing earlier work and introducing the new material. Probing questions with follow-on discussion help to clarify students' understanding and aid concentration, though care should be taken to ensure that chorus answering is kept in check in some junior cycle classes. There is usually a final review of what has been covered with the assignment of appropriate homework. This traditional approach works well, but could be further supported by the introduction of some active learning methodologies. In some lessons paired work was encouraged though the physical arrangement of classroom seating does not always encourage this.

Teachers' own personal appreciation of their subjects is good. This knowledge and experience is used to good effect in planning lessons that promote learning. The attention to planning by teachers both at department and individual level is very supportive of the effective management of student behaviour. Little time is wasted, though in some cases the pacing of classes is somewhat rushed as teachers work to achieve lesson outcomes in class periods which have been curtailed because of student movement between buildings. Homework is carefully planned to reinforce or extend what has been learnt in the lesson.

The quality of relationship between students and teachers is very good. Teachers strive to be supportive and to meet students' needs. This is evident in lessons, where teachers consistently relate to students in a personalised way, addressing students by name, encouraging discussion and valuing the contributions of individual students.

Expectations of student behaviour are very high and students generally respond very well. Behaviour is carefully monitored so that remedial action may be taken quickly where appropriate. Teachers act as good role models in their relationships with students. They are firm in class, but in a context of supporting students.

The approach taken in the teaching of the subjects inspected generally encourages good behaviour and students demonstrate high levels of respect for the points of view and values of others. Relationships between them are good and they listen to one another in lessons, work well together when called upon to do so and are mutually supportive.

#### **4.3 Assessment and Achievement**

Good assessment structures and practices are in place in the school. These are documented in the staff handbook and during the evaluation it was evident that these were applied in teaching. In addition, a review of the effectiveness of the policy has been completed as part of a further studies programme. Homework is set regularly and there is good practice in respect to corrections, especially the inclusion of written comments by teachers to assist students towards improvement.

Within the teaching of the subjects inspected, a combination of questioning, practical exercises and observation were used as the main forms of assessing student progress in class. When targeted questions are used, student responses are seen to have a formative function in that teachers follow up with discussion and explanation, especially in instances where students do not initially comprehend the point.

The formal systems for assessment and reporting outlined in the school's policy are adhered to by the subject teams and include appropriate reporting systems to parents and guardians. The practice of setting common test papers for the house exams where appropriate is well planned and to be commended. This approach has been clearly linked to subject planning and the feedback given is targeted at supporting individual progress.

Students' attitudes are positive, which leads to success in learning. They engage with the subjects and are articulate and confident in their interactions with teachers and other students. Students respond well to the school's expectations of them. There is considerable emphasis on high attainment and students generally have good attitudes to and take pride in the school and in their work. Attitudes to learning are commonly positive and make a considerable contribution to learning, to the progress students make and to achievement.

At management level, student progress in state examinations is monitored annually in the context of national norms. The board and senior management expressed concern at the inaccuracies of current media reporting of student progression to third level and the principal recently wrote to parents outlining the destination pattern of the school's Leaving Certificate students.

The school has in place systems that recognise and celebrate student achievement. On a daily basis student performance in a range of extra- and co-curricular activities is reported on through the school's public address system. While efforts are made to minimise disruption to class time by having designated announcement times, it is recommended that a less intrusive mechanism is introduced. In addition to the in-class recognition by teachers, there is a school awards system that culminates in an annual prize-giving event. The school's award system recognises achievement across a number of academic, sporting and cultural areas and is highly regarded by both parents and students. Students have also been successful in the scholarship awards of third level colleges.

## **5. Quality of Support for Students**

### **5.1 Students with special educational needs**

Castleknock College has a very small number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Those students with SEN who are enrolled include younger siblings of existing students. The parents of students often fund assessments privately, though the school also has access to supports from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Parents are also advised in the admission policy that relevant documentation relating to special educational needs is furnished in advance of the student's admission in order that the school may apply to the Department of Education and Science for resources to support the student.

While the school has been allocated some special needs assistant resources by the Department of Education and Science, this is not currently being used. Learning support is primarily provided on a withdrawal basis and centres on support for English and Mathematics. Individual education learning plans have been drafted for students in these two areas and withdrawal occurs mainly during timetabled periods for Gaeilge, as the students have exemptions from this subject.

Not all teachers showed awareness of the individual needs of students who are in receipt of support, despite efforts by the learning support teacher to communicate informally with teachers in respect of the needs of individual students. This means that where differentiation might be

appropriate in teaching, it is generally not implemented. Other opportunities also exist for teachers' improved involvement in this area including, as was suggested at one meeting during the evaluation, acting as readers for students with special accommodations in mock examinations. The inclusion of the Learning Support teacher in the bi-weekly meetings of the 'Administration Committee' is recommended as a way of formalising the role of learning support in the school's care systems.

The board and teachers are also cognisant of the need to support very able and talented students. Both parents and teachers perceive the school's traditional annual awards ceremony as an effective means by which excellence can be promoted and students recognised for high academic and sporting achievement.

### **5.2 Other supports for students: (Disadvantaged, minority and other groups)**

Castleknock College is a fee-paying school and no specific schemes are in place to assist students in meeting the cost of a place in the school. This means that students are from relatively affluent backgrounds and this is further evidenced by the capacity of students to meet additional costs associated with involvement in extra- and co-curricular activities. While the school may not include students from disadvantaged backgrounds, efforts are made in line with the characteristic spirit of the school to educate students in their responsibility to the wider community and to those less privileged. These include the presence of a school-based conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

The school also benefits from the support of an active Past Pupils' Union. The union has taken a more active role in recent years in the redevelopment programme, and an increase in the number of past men who have become actively involved in the union. This increased level of activity has also been of benefit to students. In particular, the careers night and the initiation of a mentoring programme for students entering third level, which may also extend to support at post-graduate level, are to be commended. Informal arrangements also exist whereby current Leaving Certificate students may be facilitated in receiving guidance on possible study and career paths.

### **5.3 Guidance**

The school Guidance plan has not yet been completed but an outline plan of how Guidance is managed was prepared in September 2005. This states the aims for education and vocational Guidance and personal counselling support for students. It is recommended that the school Guidance plan should be completed in accordance with the advice set out in Planning a School Guidance Programme (NGCE, 2004). The school's plan should clearly state the Guidance provision for each year group and set out the inputs from Guidance to each school programme. The plan should also detail how Guidance should be integrated in the school's pastoral structures, especially the Administration Committee, and how relationships and communication with parents should be structured.

Guidance is well supported by senior management and valued by the wider school community including parents and the board. Senior management view Guidance as a necessary support for students' learning and as a valuable aid to assist student transitions. The school is making full use of its allocation of 22 ex-quota hours for Guidance, and the Guidance counsellor manages both Guidance and counselling provision for students. Students can avail of Guidance and counselling support throughout their time in the school and seek referral through form teachers, class tutors and teachers.

The provision of Guidance is generally managed through one-to-one or small group sessions, though teachers co-operate well with the Guidance service to make class periods available for Guidance and in arranging student referrals. One aspect for review is the balance between provision available to junior and senior cycle students. All meetings are recorded and the follow-up is well managed and prompt. Personal counselling support for students is provided but when

deemed necessary students are referred, after consultation with parents, to relevant agencies and supports. In order to strengthen referral, it is suggested that some additional networking is completed with all local and national agencies catering for adolescents.

A dedicated office for Guidance is provided within the school. It is suitably equipped and well located to allow full access to students wishing to make appointments to meet with the Guidance counsellor to seek information on career or personal issues. The school's building programme seeks to enhance this provision by extending the careers library, facilitating access to ICT that would enable students to conduct web searches for careers information under the supervision of the Guidance counsellor, and facilitation of small group meetings.

#### **5.4 Pastoral Care**

The pastoral care structure of the school centres on the relationship between form teachers, class tutors and class teachers. Primary responsibility for the achievement of the pastoral goals of the school rests with the class teacher, as is appropriate. In junior cycle, class tutors and form teachers are generally assigned to teach CSPE to their tutor group. This facilitates direct engagement in a classroom setting by class tutors with the students within their group. Class tutors have responsibility for monitoring each student's progress and achievement and for liaising with the form teacher in respect to each class group. Form teachers are post holders who complete administrative functions relating to the attendance and reports systems. Form teachers meet weekly with either the principal or deputy principal as the 'Administration Committee'. Often this meeting centres on reporting on and responding to discipline issues. In order to improve the focus of the weekly review towards overall pastoral care provision and support, it is recommended that the learning support teacher and guidance counsellor are included within the Administration Committee and that attention is also given to communicating information as to student progress and overall achievement.

During the course of the evaluation it was apparent that parents and students valued the pastoral care system as it exists in the school. Each group stated that the approach of the school was consistent with its characteristic spirit in that it focused on individual students and their achievement, progress and development. In an effort to reduce the administrative burden on the school and improve communication systems with parents, the parents' groups recently initiated a text alert system with the support of school management.

The spiritual and religious aspect is a particular strength of pastoral provision in the school. The chaplaincy dimension has, in the past, relied heavily on support and staffing from the Vincentian community but the school has eased the transition to lay staff. This has been necessary in the context of declining religious vocations.

Students are involved with the operation of the school in three main ways. In the first instance, class captains elected in the junior cycle assist form teachers in the maintenance of student attendance records. In the absence of general assembly or roll call each morning, class captains present the attendance form to each teacher and return to the class tutor daily. This is further complicated in senior cycle where discrete class groups do not exist. Each form teacher collects these forms weekly and from these the appointed post-holder updates and maintains the general attendance registers for all class groups. This cumbersome form-based system even if effective is difficult to administer and consideration should be given to responsibility remaining with class tutors for the maintenance of class registers in the first instance.

The school has traditionally operated a prefect system at sixth year. Fifth-year students and the teaching staff nominate students from which the principal selects the panel of prefects. Both the students and teachers hold the role of prefect in high esteem. The duties and responsibilities of prefects are set out in a detailed document. While support for other students is explicitly set out in the descriptors, in practice the emphasis of the role is towards supporting teachers and school management, especially in relation to the application of the code of behaviour. In order to

enhance the role of the prefect as a support for younger students, particularly first year students' transition to second level, it is recommended that a formalised mentoring or leadership skills programme for college prefects is initiated.

Finally, a student council also exists. This is a democratically elected body with representatives from each class group throughout the school. The officers of the council are sixth-year students and all except one are current prefects. The council's role is not as clearly defined as that of the prefects, which may be due to its relatively recent introduction as part of the school's organisation. Unlike the prefect body, it does not meet regularly. However, the appointment of a liaison teacher is a positive feature. Though the objectives of the council are outlined in Article 2 of its constitution, formalised structures for communication with management have not been established. In addition, recent proposals to amend the council's constitution which would effectively exclude membership of junior cycle students should be reconsidered. Options for improved operation of the council include formalising both the agenda and reporting systems to improve consistency with the fundamental objectives of the council. In addition, advance preparation of junior cycle representatives either through CSPE classes or a pre-meeting session facilitated by the liaison teacher would focus the contributions of council members to discussion of the agenda items.

## **6. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

The following are the main strengths and areas for development identified in the evaluation:

- The school community recognises the importance of seeking to progress the school's characteristic spirit through the quality of educational provision.
- A high level of awareness exists among the members of the Board of Governors of the developments in education legislation and its impact for the management of schools.
- A board of management as outlined in section 14(1) of the Education Act 1998 has not yet been constituted.
- The re-activation of the Education Committee of the board is a very welcome development as it is important that education policy is developed at the same time as the school's physical infrastructure.
- Significant progress has been made in advancing the school's building programme and this involves considerable, ongoing time commitment by the board and senior management of the school.
- Work is ongoing on the development of school policies but there is scope for greater involvement of the school's staff in the School Development Planning process.
- The total weekly instruction time is below the minimum recommended time of 28 hours as set out in Circular Letter M29/95 Time in School.
- The movement of students between school buildings as is necessitated by the existing building configuration can lead to loss of instruction time.
- While allocation of class time to the majority of subjects is good, increased efforts should be made to ensure balanced time distribution between subjects and a spread of lessons through the school week.
- The Transition Year Programme provides a wide range of opportunities for personal and academic development of students. Considerable attention has been given to drafting a programme that engages and challenges the students. However, the breadth of out-of-school activities that students can avail of can sometimes lead to disruption of formal teaching time.
- The breadth and quality of the co-curricular and extra-curricular provision is a particular strength of the school. Also of merit is the emphasis placed on sporting, cultural and academic activities. These provide opportunities for the majority of students to be involved in activities that suit their particular interests and abilities.
- Excellent facilities including a library, canteen and outdoor pitches are provided for students' use.

- The quality of care for students is good. Teachers are supportive of students and seek to meet their personal and academic needs. This is evident in lessons observed, where teachers relate to students in a positive way, engendering mutual respect and consideration between all members of the school community.

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

- Within the framework of the proposed new trustee arrangement and the ongoing redevelopment of the school's physical infrastructure, it is essential that a representative board of management be established.
- A revision of the role descriptors for the senior management team is advised in preparation for the completion of the school redevelopment programme. This revision should focus on the interrelationship between the principal and deputy principal with respect to the management of the day-to-day activities of the school and the management of teaching and learning.
- The role of the in school management team as part of the formal management structure of the school should be recognised. In particular, formal structures should be established by which the team can work initially in progressing school development planning. The focus of the team can then evolve as determined by the needs of the school.
- First year class groups should be assigned designated class rooms based in one of the two existing houses, preferably Dowley House. This would ease the transition of first year students entering post-primary education, minimise the loss of instruction time resulting from student movement between the existing two school houses and facilitate ease of supervision of students between classes and at break times. A similar arrangement for assigning first year students to base classrooms should be considered for the new school building when it comes on stream.
- While the evaluation team acknowledge the breadth of activities included in the Transition Year Programme, improved co-ordination of the out-of-school co-curricular activities is required. In addition to synchronising student involvement with out-of-school activities, a maximum number of such activities per student should be established. This will improve consistency in the attendance of students for formal classes and improve the capacity of students and teachers to complete the objectives set for the programme.
- In planning for teaching and learning across the curriculum increased emphasis should be placed on incorporating the use of Information and Communication Technologies in subject teaching.
- In order to enhance the pastoral care aspect of the work of the Administration Committee, the school's Guidance Counsellor and Learning Support teacher should be included within the team.
- Priority should be given within the role of college prefect to supporting the transition of junior students into the life of the school. This would be best achieved by the introduction of a formalised mentoring or leadership skills programme for students offered the role of college prefect.

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 – 8 May 2006
- Subject Inspection of English – 8 May 2006
- Subject Inspection of Guidance – 8 May 2006
- Subject Inspection of History – 8 May 2006

