



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

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Gort Community School  
Gort, County Galway  
Roll number: 91498C**

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**WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT**

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of Gort Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal and deputy principal, the teachers, the school's board of management, and representatives of the parents' association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and interacted with the class teachers. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Gort Community School resulted from the amalgamation of Our Lady's College, St Joseph's Secondary School, and St Colman's Vocational School post-primary schools located in the town of Gort, Co. Galway. The school opened in September 1995.

The school has twenty-seven feeder primary schools. This is a large number of feeder primary schools. The student population includes students from a diverse range of cultures and socio-economic groups. The diversity of the student cohort creates challenges in terms of inclusion and integration of students, support for students for whom English is not their first language, and pastoral support that is sensitive to the cultural and personal needs of all students. The school has worked proactively to address these challenges.

## 2. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 2.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school motto refers to *Reverentia* and a strong sense of mutual respect among the members of the school community was evident throughout the evaluation. The school crest incorporates the motto *Ni neart go cur le chéile*, referring to strength through unity. A potential challenge, for any school arising from amalgamation, is that of building a unified staff with a shared sense of purpose and common focus for the school's development. It was evident from interviews and from observation that the staff of Gort Community School acts in a manner that supports a common purpose and shared focus for the ongoing development of the school. Further exemplifying the sense of unity, there is a good atmosphere of mutual support among the staff. Good relationships among staff members are supported by the work of a staff social committee that celebrates significant events in the life of the school and of teachers. The principles of respect and unity referred to in the school's motto and school's crest extend to relationships among staff and students. Inspectors noted excellent rapport among staff and students in the lessons evaluated and observation of informal interactions among staff and students showed that staff-student interactions are characterised by a strong sense of mutual respect and this is to be commended.

The school, in its mission statement, describes itself as a Christian community. It is noted that the school plan refers to the multi-denominational nature of the school and its strong Christian ethos. This ethos derives from those of the schools that amalgamated to form Gort Community School. It is clear that the school in its daily operation acts in an inclusive manner and that the term "Christian community" is used in an inclusive manner and is embracing of all denominations. It is noted that *Tagairt*, the manual for boards of management and principals of community and comprehensive schools states, *Community Schools are commonly perceived to be "multi-denominational"*. With the increasing international and multi-denominational nature of the student cohort, it may be opportune to reflect on the wording of the mission statement to highlight the inclusive nature of the school and to ensure that this is evident to all.

The school is conscious of its role within the community and it strives to provide a comprehensive system of post-primary and continuing education within the community. The school has established good links with local action groups such as the local Brazilian Association, Gort Embracing Migration (GEM), and Gort Regional Alliance for Community and the Environment (GRACE). It has entered into a mutually satisfactory agreement with the board of management of Gort Community Centre for the use of the centre. The school uses its adult education programme in an adaptive manner to meet the perceived learning needs of the community. In addition, the school provides use of its facilities, subject to approval by the board, to outside groups and local persons. In these ways, the school plays a pivotal role in the life of the local community in the Gort area.

Discussion with students revealed that high but realistic expectations are generally set for them and this is to be commended. Students appreciate the efforts made to acknowledge their achievements. These are acknowledged through displays within the school, intercom announcements, annual awards ceremonies, annual graduation night, attendance certificate for full attendance, and positive feedback from class teachers and school management. Positive feedback and acknowledgement of students' achievements helps to foster and sustain a strong spirit of mutual respect and a sense of positive self-esteem within the school community and this is to be commended.

### 2.2 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted in accordance with the deeds of trust. The board benefits from significant levels of educational and leadership expertise among its members. The board values and appreciates the leadership shown by senior school management and there is good collaboration between the principal, who acts as secretary to the board, and the board.

Interview showed that the members of the board are aware of their role and responsibilities and that they discharge these in a committed and dedicated manner. Newly elected board members are facilitated to attend relevant training and this is to be commended. The board deals with and approves the school's financial accounts at each meeting and this is appropriate. Audits of the accounts take place as required. The board is aware of and appropriately fulfils its role in the selection and recruitment of staff.

The board is proactive in its role. In the past, the board has successfully progressed changes to the curriculum offered by the school. Currently, it has identified key development issues and is working to address them. The main issue being addressed by the board at present is that of the potential increase in numbers due to the planned closure of a neighbouring school. In response to this development, the board is consulting with the Department of Education and Science and has begun a review of its admissions policy.

The board operates in a manner that facilitates open discussion and decisions have historically been reached through consensus and agreement. This supports a unified and focused approach by the board to the management of the school and this is to be commended.

Board members report informally to the constituencies from which they were elected on issues where there is no requirement to maintain confidentiality. In continuing to develop awareness of the good work of the board and its role in the life of the school, it is recommended that the use of an agreed written report of board meetings be addressed.

Board members are visible in their support for the school by attending special school occasions and by formally acknowledging the achievements and contributions of staff and students. It would be beneficial to consider how to further highlight the composition and work of the board in order to achieve the greatest possible awareness among the school community of the good work done by the board.

The board addresses all policies brought to it for adoption. Policies are discussed, amendments are suggested if required, and policies are then formally adopted. This is wholly appropriate.

The parents' association plays an active part in the life of the school. The association has a constitution in place and is affiliated to the relevant national body and this is appropriate. The parents' association plays a pivotal role in the operation of the school's book rental scheme and the involvement of members of the association in operating this scheme is to be commended. The parents' representatives meet regularly and their meetings are attended by the deputy principal who acts as liaison between the association and the school. This facilitates open communication between senior school management and the parents' association and this is to be commended.

### 2.3 In-school management

The principal and deputy principal work well together to provide effective daily leadership for the school. They carry out their duties in a committed and dedicated manner, with the best interests of the school as the focus for their work. While working collaboratively, they each have

clearly defined areas of responsibility. They meet regularly to keep each other informed of issues that arise and to plan for future work. This is good practice and ensures that there is a cohesive and shared approach to managing the school.

The in-school management structures that support the work of the principal and deputy principal derive primarily from the posts of responsibility within the school. The post-holders described a sense of professional trust and a positive atmosphere of collegiality. This positive atmosphere is to be commended. In addition to the posts of responsibility, management of students is facilitated through a class tutor system. Teachers voluntarily undertake the role of class tutor after consultation with senior school management. The role of class tutor places teachers as the first contact persons in dealing with issues concerning students. The very good work done by teachers in the voluntary role of class tutor is acknowledged and is to be highly commended.

It is reported that all staff members who have a post of responsibility have a contract relating to their post and this is appropriate. The posts of responsibility assigned to staff members are discharged diligently and in a professional manner. The schedule of posts has been discussed at staff meetings and some changes resulted from these discussions. It is noted that the school intends to further review the schedule of posts in consultation with staff and it is recommended that this proceed as a priority. Post-holders acknowledged that refinement of the duties attaching to some posts with an emphasis on the revised duties maximising the extensive educational, management and leadership expertise among the staff could lead to a greater contribution to the management of the school and of students. The school expressed positive views in relation to opportunities for the creation of new roles within the schedule of posts of responsibility. The views expressed by the staff were discussed during post-evaluation meetings in the school. The desire of staff to progressively review and adapt the schedule of posts is evidence of its commitment to the students in its care.

The school has a comprehensive and well-managed system of recording student absenteeism. The school is proactive and forward-looking in this area as it is seeking to further refine and update its system. In continuing to support the school in managing and encouraging students' attendance, review of the schedule of posts of responsibility provides an opportunity to build on the good work already achieved and to further support students and their families in relation to students' attendance. Consideration could be given during review to developing the intertwining areas of attendance, pastoral care, and support for international students.

Some members of the school's middle management team have received training for their role but this has occurred mainly in curricular-related areas. The school reports that where opportunities for professional development arise they are brought to the attention of the relevant staff. In supporting a culture of continuing professional development (CPD), it is advised that the CPD needs of staff in management roles be identified and that plans be put in place to address these needs. This will be particularly beneficial where staff members wish to develop expertise to fulfil any new roles that may arise from review of the schedule of posts of responsibility.

There are appropriate practices in place that support regular communication among the class tutors and year heads and among year heads and senior school management. Communication on whole-school issues is facilitated through regular briefings by the principal at break times and at staff meetings. Staff meetings take place in accordance with agreed national procedures. Open agenda for staff meetings are in place where teachers may add any item in advance of the meeting. This supports open communication and transparent decision-making processes in the school.

Some post-holders report weekly to senior school management, some post-holders produce material such as newsletters that shows the good work they have done, and other post-holders produce a formal written report for senior school management. The use of newsletters, reports, or the school website could be of benefit in further highlighting and developing an appreciation of the good work done by the middle management team.

Students were at all times courteous and there was a sense of positive discipline among the student body. The management of students is facilitated by good relationships among staff and students and is guided by the principles and rules outlined in the *Code of Good School Behaviour*. The code is a well-considered document and it derives, appropriately, from the school's mission statement. The rules contained in the document provide a comprehensive reference for staff and students and cater for a wide range of issues that might arise in a school. The school has worked to address the potential issue of bullying. An anti-bullying charter is displayed throughout the school and the code outlines the school's approach to dealing with and preventing bullying. These good practices are to be commended. It is noted that the school proposes to review some minor elements of the code. It is recommended that the school review the sanction of automatic suspension and the requirement to apply for re-admission described in section 6 of the code.

There are effective systems in place for managing students' arrival to and departure from school by bus. All students remain on the school grounds throughout the day except those with written parental permission to leave. There is an effective system of supervision of students during school time, the efficient running of this system is attributed to the dedicated participation of staff members, and this is to be commended.

#### **2.4 Management of resources**

There are good practices in place that support the induction of new teachers. These include an induction day for new staff members, the provision of an information pack on the school and informal, ongoing support for newly appointed teachers from subject colleagues. These practices are to be commended. In continuing to build on these good practices, it is advised that the school develop a formal mentoring system for newly appointed teachers.

The school supports teachers' CPD by facilitating attendance at relevant in-service education courses, by providing financial support for membership of subject associations and for teachers who undertake relevant further studies. In addition, in-service education courses have been organised for the whole staff on relevant topics. There is good provision to support teachers in their use of information and communication technology (ICT).

The school grounds and classrooms are very clean and are very well maintained. The school has achieved the Green Flag award. This is a credit to the awareness and participation of students and staff in creating a pleasant learning environment.

The school has good sports facilities, particularly its playing pitches. While the school does not have its own sports hall, it has entered into an agreement with Gort Community Centre for the use of the neighbouring sports facilities. These facilities were viewed and they adequately meet the requirements for indoor sporting facilities for the school. The school is proactive in progressing ongoing improvement of its facilities and it is currently addressing the issue of providing new changing and showering facilities to complement its existing facilities.

The current schedule of classroom and specialist room accommodation satisfactorily meets the needs of the school at its current enrolment. However, the staffroom is a busy space and there are limited storage areas for teachers' books and no area in which teachers may work undisturbed. Students benefit from having a locker in which they may store their books and equipment. However, it was noted that facilities for storing students' sports gear are limited. There is an office used by the administration staff, one office for use by year heads, and one office for use by the guidance counsellor. In addition, the principal and the deputy principal have their own offices. While this office accommodation meets the needs of the school, the space available for storage of guidance counselling materials and for access by students to dedicated ICT facilities for guidance counselling is limited. It is recommended that the board prioritise and progress these issues.

The school does not currently have a system of formal subject-based budgets in place. Requests for resources are met on a case-by-case basis and there is good satisfaction among teachers with the level of resources available to them. There is a clearly defined procedure in place

for purchasing the resources required by staff and this is good practice.

Some classrooms have a well-developed, visual learning environment and the work done by teachers in creating a visually stimulating learning environment is to be commended. It is encouraged that during the subject planning process all teachers give consideration to how frequent displays of visual stimuli such as relevant charts, posters, and students' work might support teaching and learning throughout all classrooms and specialist rooms in the school.

The school has good ICT facilities with two ICT laboratories. All classrooms are networked to a central server and this enables broadband internet access. This is supportive of teachers in integrating ICT in their lessons. Broadband internet access is provided in the staff room and this facility is helpful to teachers when planning and preparing for lessons. Teachers may, subject to availability, bring their classes to a computer room by booking it in advance. Students have access at lunchtime, by arrangement with teachers, to computers located in classrooms and in the library. This provision is to be commended and it is encouraged that the school consider how it might further support students' access to and use of computers outside of timetabled classes.

Regular fire drills take place and this is appropriate. The school, appropriately, has a health and safety statement. The statement was last reviewed in 2004. Due to the enactment of the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* review of the health and safety statement is recommended. Review as needs arise coupled with an annual review is best practice and will enable the school to ensure that it continues to meet its obligations under the relevant legislation.

### 3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

The school has engaged with school development planning and is developing a school plan as required by the *Education Act 1998, Section 21*. It has been supported in this work by engagement with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI), [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie). The focus for planning work to date has been to satisfy statutory requirements and to address key issues in the management of the school. The school has put in place a number of policies including an admissions policy, code of good behaviour, ICT plan, health and safety statement, relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy, child protection guidelines, homework policy and transition year (TY) plan. Evidence was provided to confirm that the board of management and staff have taken appropriate steps to develop policies in line with the provisions in *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health and Children, 1999, updated issue May 2004) and *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Evidence was also provided to confirm that the board of management has adopted and implemented the policies. A designated liaison person has been appointed in line with the requirements of the Departmental guidelines.

Much of the work that has been completed deals with planning for curricular needs in the school. The success of this work is shown by the introduction of the TY programme in 1996, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in 1997, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in 1999, Agricultural Science in 2000, and Music in 2005. Since the inception of the school there has been ongoing review and updating of the code of good behaviour. The school reports that recently (since 2000) the focus for the school's planning work has been on the areas of ICT, RSE, special needs education, adult education, and admissions.

The board reports that it has instigated a review of the admissions policy. This review provides an opportunity for the board to reflect on the wording of the policy in relation to enrolment of students with special educational needs and so assure that the policy continues to provide for equality of access for students with special educational needs as required by the *Education Act 1998, Section 21(2)*. In addition, in enhancing transparency in decision-making, the admissions policy could give guidance on the criteria used to satisfy the stipulation that the admission of a student will not lead to "a diminution in standards of behaviour".

In building on the good work done in creating the school's ICT plan and in developing an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) it would be of value to broaden the AUP to include all users of the school's computer facilities.

The school plan document that was presented for inspection is a comprehensive document. It addresses the current issues that impact on the school and strives to proactively identify and plan to meet future challenges and this is to be commended as it demonstrates a high level of reflective awareness. The document seeks to describe strategies to address the challenges faced by the school and where this occurs it is to be commended as the suggested strategies are wholly appropriate. Already, some of the suggested strategies have been put in place and are working well. Those strategies that have not yet been activated are being actively developed for implementation and this is to be encouraged.

The most recent developments in planning have encompassed work by staff in the area of subject planning. Teachers have made good progress by collaboratively developing subject plans. This is to be commended. Senior school management is enthusiastic about building on this good work by using the subject planning process to help optimise students' learning. This is to be encouraged. Documentation supplied by the school indicated a desire to review subject-planning work at the end of the current school year. This is to be encouraged as ongoing review and evaluation with consequent refinements is good practice. In developing its practices in review and self-evaluation, the school may find it useful to consider the themes outlined in *Looking at our School, An aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools*.

In the area of policy development, the school has identified a number of priorities. These priorities include further development of its special educational needs policy, pastoral care policy, a small number of issues within the code of behaviour, review of the schedule of posts of responsibility, review of curriculum issues, strategies to address gender issues in subject uptake, progressing its guidance and counselling policy, and further work in the area of education and support for international students. The selection of these areas as priorities accords with the findings of the evaluation team in relation to the future focus for ongoing development and planning activity within the school and progression of actions to address these priorities is to be encouraged.

The board and the school's teaching staff reported good awareness of the contents of the current school plan while parents were familiar with some of the contents of the plan, mainly those relating to the code of good behaviour and the admissions policy. All students are given a copy of the *Code of Good Behaviour* prior to enrolment and this is to be commended. In building on existing good communication with parents, it is advised that the contents of the plan be circulated to parents as this is required by the *Education Act 1998, Section 21(4)*.

Information was supplied to show that senior school management has recently delivered training to school staff on the school development planning and subject-planning processes. This shows that the school is generating its own internal capacity among staff to address planning needs and it provides evidence for a high level of engagement by senior school management in progressing planning work in the school.

The principal and the deputy principal act as co-ordinators for the school's development planning process. The overall co-ordination of the school development planning process is a significant task and adds to the already considerable workload of the principal and deputy principal. Some consideration should be given to how coordination responsibilities can be managed and shared in a manner that further supports staff ownership of the school development planning process.

In guiding the development of the school plan senior school management has shown strategic vision in identifying long-term planning goals. Evidence was provided to show that the staff contributes significantly to the planning process and helps to shape its direction and this is to be commended. Interview with parents and students showed that they have collaborated with the school in the development of various policies and this is to be commended as best practice.

#### 4. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

##### 4.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

At junior cycle, students study the Junior Certificate programme. At senior cycle, the school offers the TY programme, the Established Leaving Certificate, the LCVP, and the LCA programme. Thus, the school offers a very broad range of programme options to students.

There is a wide range of subjects on offer to students at junior cycle and at senior cycle. The school strives to offer the broadest possible range of subject choices to students. In addition to the subjects that are offered during timetabled school hours the school facilitates students who wish to study additional subjects outside of school time.

The TY programme is appropriately documented. The teachers who are involved in the programme draw it up. The programme contains many beneficial components and strives to give students a broad and balanced educational experience. However, the programme does not contain any formal elements of History or Geography. It is recommended that during the annual review of the TY programme the school should plan for inclusion of a module of History and of Geography. This will enhance the current range of subjects provided during Transition Year and will support students by enabling them to sample the broadest possible range of subjects in advance of making their senior-cycle subject choices.

Analysis of the TY programme showed that some subject areas have successfully planned to meet the challenge of preparing students academically for senior cycle without over-reliance on Leaving Certificate material. It is recommended that the subject-planning process be used by all subject teachers to discuss and develop materials to be used during the TY programme. This will have the benefit of enabling all teachers who are involved in teaching within the TY programme to draw on the broadest possible range of expertise from colleagues. Good practice is shown by the use of end-of-year evaluation by teachers, students, and co-ordinators variously of the TY programme, LCA, and LCVP and this is to be commended.

Adult education is a positive feature of the school and there is a diverse programme available to members of the community. The school reports that it is conscious of the need to support all tutors employed in delivering adult education and that it has provided tutors with support on topics such as teaching methodologies. The ongoing sharing of resources and best practice among the school staff and the adult education tutors is to be encouraged. The programme features a range of classes that encompass leisure, academic and practical subjects. In particular, the adult education programme offers opportunities to engage parents who are not Irish nationals in developing their education and in enhancing their understanding of the Irish education system. The school is to be commended for its initiative in advertising the adult education programme by using multi-lingual posters to promote an inclusive intake of participants from the community. The current programme includes a course in English as a foreign language, Portuguese for beginners, and in internet skills for Brazilian nationals. This provision seeks to meet specific needs among the local community and is to be commended. In building on the proactive nature of the adult education programme it may be of value to consider developing courses in areas such as parenting skills, adult guidance, life planning, study skills, and cultural studies, that parents and students could attend together or separately. This would continue to enhance the central role that the school plays in the life of the community.

At senior cycle, an option available to students involves selection of Physical Education, ICT, or LCVP. If a student does not wish to study Physical Education, ICT, or LCVP then he or she is provided with a supervised study class. It is acknowledged that provision of a wide range of extra-curricular physical activities by the school supports many students in remaining physically active. However, in supporting the work of the school where all students are encouraged to participate in Physical Education and in keeping with reports such as *National Task Force on Obesity Report 2005* and *School Children and Sport in Ireland, ESRI, 2005* it is recommended that the school's timetabling arrangements be reviewed to ensure that all students participate in Physical Education each week. Some useful advice and reference may be found in the *Department of Education and Science Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*.

The school is in operation for twenty-eight hours and forty-five minutes weekly. The required minimum length of a school week consists of twenty-eight hours instruction. It is advised that the provision of supervised study classes be reviewed to ensure that these classes are not calculated within the total minimum number of hours of weekly instruction required.

While the school encourages all students to study a modern European language, it is conscious that some students with specific special learning needs may experience difficulties in studying a modern European language. Accordingly, the school has acted in a proactive manner to provide Technology as an alternative subject at junior cycle and Geography at senior cycle for these students. This provision shows that the school is considerate of students' needs. The school recognises that it is important that these subjects are not perceived as suitable only for students with special educational needs. Thus, the school continues to monitor the profile and uptake of these subjects and good satisfaction was expressed with the uptake and profile among students of Technology and of Geography.

The issue of supporting engagement by international students with education is foremost among the school's priorities. Thus, the school has entered international students whose native language is a non-curricular modern European language for the State examination in that language. This initiative can be particularly valuable and is noteworthy in the context of the large number of students of Brazilian nationality for whom Portuguese is their first language.

The school has agreed with the Department to provide the new senior cycle syllabus in Technology from September 2007 and funding has been made available by the Department to support this. It is now opportune for senior school management in consultation with the engineering, construction studies, drawing, and technology teachers to plan for the future of the technology subjects in the school.

##### 4.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

The school has shown that it is responsive to the needs of students by introducing new subjects and programmes to the curriculum. The most recent development is the piloting of the introduction of Religious Education as an examination subject.

The school has identified the need for students to acquire ICT skills and has included ICT lessons as part of the curriculum. Fourth-year students may study for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) qualification or for a number of other certified courses. Creating provision for the development of ICT skills, which are an essential part of the world of work and further study, is good practice and is to be commended.

The school has made provision for Social Personal and Health Education by provision of one class period weekly during each year of the junior cycle. This is appropriate.

It is commendable that the school has reflected on the issue of achieving gender-balanced uptake in all subject areas. Currently, trends in the uptake of Home Economics and technology subjects are along traditional gender lines. The school is aware of these trends and ensures equality of gender access to all subjects. Teachers are encouraged to promote their subject area to all students and gender equality is addressed by senior school management during visits to primary schools and at information nights for parents and guardians. In building on these good practices, the school is advised to formalise a strategy to encourage a more gender-balanced uptake across the curriculum. In developing this strategy consideration might usefully be given to the introduction of a taster programme for first-year students, the use of timetabled guidance lessons at junior cycle, and the ongoing use of internal and external speakers as role models in subject areas. The development of a subject information booklet that contains information on the course content and career possibilities for each subject area could

be undertaken and this could be disseminated to students and parents in advance of students making their subject choices. The TY programme could also provide a suitable vehicle for addressing gender bias towards some subjects.

Subject options for junior cycle and for senior cycle are based on student demand and this is best practice. There is good support for students in advance of making their subject choices. The school is supportive of students who wish to change their optional subjects and facilitates students to do this during first year. This support for students is to be commended.

In first year, all classes are of mixed ability. At the start of second year, students are streamed for Gaeilge, English, and Mathematics based on the results of assessments completed in the previous academic year. Timetabled concurrencies in these subjects support students in accessing the subjects at a level appropriate to their abilities and this is good practice.

In deciding on the programme and subjects to study at senior cycle, students benefit from advice and guidance from their class teachers, programme co-ordinators, guidance counsellor, deputy principal, and principal. Additionally, support and information are provided through information evenings for parents and availability of the guidance counsellor to meet with parents individually. These valuable supports are to be commended.

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

There is a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities available to students in this school. There are good systems in place to minimise the loss of teaching time and students' absences from school due to extra-curricular activities. Students' participation in activities is facilitated by teachers and a significant number of teachers are involved. Internal analysis of student-participation levels by the school showed that there are very good levels of student participation in extra-curricular activities.

The range of activities available to students is sufficiently broad to cater satisfactorily for a very wide range of interests. Where students express an interest in additional activities the school endeavours to support their participation in such activities. An example of the school's willingness to respond to students' needs and the generosity of spirit of staff members is seen by the fact that in response to requests from students, volleyball is being considered as an addition to the current schedule of activities. In addition, a games club has been set up at lunchtimes. The club provides an opportunity for students to make friends and to gain social skills and confidence by participating in board games. These initiatives are to be commended.

The school's ethos is one of encouraging all students to take part and this is to be commended. Teachers' selfless dedication and ongoing contribution to supporting students in taking part in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is acknowledged and is to be highly commended.

Students are kept informed of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities through a variety of media such as posters, announcements, notices, and presentations during the open day. As well as sporting activities, the school provides non-sporting activities such as the school concert and Comenius project. These initiatives provide an opportunity to embrace cultural diversity among the student population.

The school supports students by facilitating external speakers to address students on important issues such as alcohol awareness, positive mental health, and awareness of issues relating to racism. There are good links with external sporting bodies such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Rugby Football Union. In addition, the school has cultivated links with music and arts bodies and these links support students' participation in valuable extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. During the evaluation, students showcased their work for a number of co-curricular events such as the Young Social Innovators competition, public speaking competition, and Young Scientist and Technology competition. It was evident that students and their teachers, in preparing for and presenting at these events, have done very good work. This work is to be highly commended.

The school is proactive in ensuring that students' participation in extra-curricular activities is balanced with their engagement in their academic studies. There is an established policy in place that students who are absent from lessons due to extra-curricular activities must produce the requisite homework for the next lesson. The school has given thoughtful consideration to the level of participation in extra-curricular activities that is appropriate for students and has developed guidelines in this area. These guidelines are an example of the balanced approach that the school takes to the holistic development of students.

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

#### **5.1 Planning and preparation**

Formal subject departments and subject planning commenced in Gort Community School in 2005 and teachers work collaboratively and meet regularly to plan their work. A collaborative approach and a high level of co-operation and peer-group support were evident during the evaluation.

Teachers meet formally on a regular basis during the year to discuss subject-related issues. Formal records of these meetings are kept and issues that arise are discussed with the principal when appropriate. Teachers also meet informally on a regular basis to discuss subject-related issues.

Subject co-ordinators who actively facilitate the sharing of resources and good practice are in place and clear long-term plans for the teaching of the subjects in the school have been developed.

Comprehensive programmes of work, for almost all subjects evaluated, in line with curricular requirements for each year group have been developed. The structured delivery and prior preparation of material during the evaluation indicated that teachers were engaging in short term planning.

Subject teachers are informed of students who require learning support and those with special educational needs at the beginning of each year and liaise with the school's learning-support team when planning for these students in their classes. This good practice is to be commended.

Teachers have identified and/or developed subject-related resources and requests for additional resources are made through the principal.

#### **5.2 Teaching and learning**

There was effective individual planning and preparation by subjects for all lessons that were observed.

All lessons observed had a clear learning intention and in some instances this was shared with students at the start of each lesson. The majority of lessons observed were clearly structured so that content and pace were appropriate to the class group, the subject matter and to the time available.

A range of appropriate and varied teaching methodologies was employed in the lessons observed. In the subject areas evaluated many teachers built on students' prior knowledge and personal experiences to deepen their understanding of the subject matter under study and to

stimulate skill development. In the majority of subjects evaluated there was evidence of effective active-learning methodologies. In some lessons these were supported by teacher demonstration to model best practice and in other instances by student demonstration and peer evaluation. In the majority of lessons evaluated teachers had developed effective strategies to support and guide students through the development of key skills.

There was evidence of differentiated teaching methods to meet the needs of all students in a number of subjects evaluated. It is recommended that effective differentiated teaching methods be shared among teachers in all subject departments and that the learning support department formally support this work.

Teachers employed a range of effective questioning strategies that were specific, relevant and clear in all lessons observed. In some instances however they were not inclusive of all students. Best practice involves the use of questioning strategies that are inclusive of all students and this is recommended.

A wide variety of resources was used to support teaching in the subjects evaluated and in some instances ICT was effectively integrated into lessons. It is recommended that subject departments consider how to further integrate ICT into the teaching and learning experience in Gort Community School.

Classroom management was effective and was conducive to an orderly and participative learning environment in all lessons evaluated. Classroom discipline was sensitively maintained and was supported by appropriate lesson content and pacing.

In the lessons evaluated teacher-student interactions were engaging, purposeful and mutually respectful. A number of inspectors commented on the excellent rapport that was evident in all lessons evaluated. In a number of lessons, teachers consistently affirmed students' responses and integrated them into lessons. The visual classroom environment in some of the lessons evaluated was stimulating and motivational for student learning. It is suggested that teachers should develop a print-rich environment in all classrooms and should share ideas for enhancing each classroom.

In the lessons observed, students demonstrated a willingness to co-operate with their teacher in their learning and engaged in all classroom activities and discussions. In most lessons that were observed, students were active in their learning and their responses to questions and completion of assignments reflected a very good quality of understanding.

### 5.3 Assessment

A range of formal and informal assessment modes, formative and summative, is used effectively to monitor student competence and progress.

Gort Community School adopted a whole-school policy for homework in 2005 and a general whole-school assessment procedure has been established. A review of homework journals indicated that there is variety in the type of homework that is given on a regular basis to all year groups. Examination of a sample of students' copybooks revealed that a broad range of exercises had been set as homework in line with the requirements of the syllabuses and they had been corrected in all cases. However, variations in the treatment of students' work were noted. Subject departments are encouraged to discuss this issue and to arrive at a common policy for the provision of formative feedback. Subject departments may find materials such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie), "Assessment for Learning" materials useful in this regard. It is recommended that a common approach to assessment be developed by each subject department to assist in comparison of student attainment across class groups and to inform subject planning.

Results of students' assessments are recorded systematically and communicated to parents periodically and these practices are appropriate. The school encourages regular contact between teachers and parents through use of the student journal or by telephone.

The school has made available to staff copies of results obtained by students in the State examinations. The comparison of students' results in the State examinations in conjunction with analysis of marking schemes and chief examiners' reports can form a useful component in subject planning and is to be encouraged.

## 6. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

### 6.1 Students with special educational needs

A comprehensive planning document, *Special Education Needs Plan 2006-2007*, developed by the school guides its work in the area of special needs education. The work done in producing this document and the consideration given to how to best support students with special educational needs, is to be commended. The document describes the procedures the school has put in place to support students with special educational needs. The school in planning for the area of special educational needs has produced a calendar showing the planned activities for the year. Thus, there is an overarching vision and structured approach to provision for students with special educational needs and this is to be commended.

There are good links with the feeder primary schools, Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, school's learning support team, and teachers. The learning support team has forged good links with the chaplain and in cases where an issue of pastoral care arises a student may be referred to the chaplain for counselling.

The school is progressive in its practices and has drawn up a student profile template that is used to inform subject teachers of relevant issues and appropriate methodologies to use when working with individual students. In addition, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) template has been drawn up for use in the school. These good practices benefit the school in its work and it reports that IEPs have been drawn up for all students who have a special needs assistant (SNA). It is encouraged that the school build on this good work by developing an IEP for each student with special educational needs.

The learning-support team works in co-operation with the SNAs employed by the school and there is a good atmosphere of collaboration. The team keeps records of meetings, assessments of students, and of work done with students. These practices are wholly appropriate and are to be commended. Where students are not making progress in their learning they may be re-assessed and the learning-support team investigates the reasons behind any difficulties. This is to be commended as it places improvements in students' learning at the core of the support offered by the school.

The school has set up a special class for international students who are experiencing English language difficulties. The programme offered to students is a one-year immersion programme. The nature of the programme has many beneficial aspects and strives to meet the need to increase students' competence in English as a Second Language (ESL). The programme devised by the school parallels to a great degree the programme provided by Integrate Ireland Language Training (IILT) that is supported by the Department.

In previous years, students from the special class group were integrated with students from the mainstream for a number of subjects. Currently, the school's special class group is a distinct group and there is no formal integration in class groups with other students. The IILT immersion programme supports the provision of focused support for students while enabling them to participate in the mainstream to the greatest possible extent. Therefore, in building on its current good practices, it is recommended that the school consider how it will best adapt its current

programme to reflect the framework described by IILT. A full range of support materials including a copy of IILT's *Immersion Programme for non-English speaking students entering post-primary school* may be downloaded at [www.iilt.ie](http://www.iilt.ie).

One of the challenges facing the school is that of ensuring age-appropriate placement for some international students for whom English is a second language. Full integration in a mainstream programme happens after students who need language support have completed the one-year immersion course and when their level of English is sufficient to support complete participation in a mainstream programme. To support age-appropriate placement for students who are participating in the school's immersion programme, it is recommended that the stand-alone language classes for international students with significant language difficulties be interwoven with age-appropriate curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular learning experiences with other students.

Discussion with students showed that the exact criteria used to determine their competence in English are unclear to them. Many of the students in the special class are eager to progress to a mainstream programme in an age-appropriate class group. Discussion also revealed that students are unaware of the exact criteria that will be used to determine their progression. It is recommended that students be informed of the criteria used in the initial assessment of competence and in determining the progress that they make. The assessment aspect of the existing immersion programme could be further strengthened in line with the IILT devised English proficiency benchmarks (A1 Breakthrough, A2 Waystage, and B1 Threshold). Using this approach to assess students' individual proficiencies in the language sub-skills on entry and regularly during the programme will assist in informing students of their progress and of improvements in their English-language proficiency.

The special class group benefits from contact with a core group of teachers with experience in learning support and in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). It is clear that the team of teachers providing language support is a caring, dedicated group. Meeting frequently, they have discussed issues of planning, students' needs, resourcing, and the sharing of good practice. Not only has the team adjusted its schemes of work on foot of these meetings, but it has also identified areas for improvement in the English language immersion model it is operating. It was evident from discussion with students in the special class that there is a range of English-language abilities among them. The team working with the students is aware of this range of abilities and strives to cater for learners of different proficiency levels within the cohort of international students. This is to be commended. School management and the teachers timetabled for language-support work are highly commended for their sensitive, student-centred approaches to supporting the needs of international students.

The voluntary role of language-support co-ordinator is fulfilled in a dedicated and committed manner. At present, in addition to teaching timetabled ESL classes the language-support co-ordinator also acts as class tutor, briefs the school chaplain about student-care issues, stays after school to meet with students' parents, liaises with the local Brazilian Association to get summary comments for students' reports translated into Portuguese, and acts as chair for the language-support team meetings. In supporting the school and the international students enrolled in the school, these duties are of fundamental importance and accordingly it is recommended that consideration be given to creating supporting structures for the discharge of these duties.

The school reports that the immersion programme parallels the first year of the Junior Certificate programme. As per the IILT English language immersion framework, language support for students should be structured in three phases: the learning core, the development of school learning skills, and the development of subject-specific learning skills. Generally, students' introduction to formal subjects should occur on a staged basis as their proficiency in English increases, rather than simultaneously with English-language study, as is the case currently in the school. To help school management and the language-support team plan for and implement adaptations within the current support model, the school should register with IILT and attendance at IILT post-primary seminars should be encouraged and facilitated.

The school has set up a special class in first year for students with moderate general-learning difficulties. This class provides students with a reduced curriculum while also providing them with some classes in life skills.

Where students with special educational needs have an exemption from the study of Gaeilge (Irish) the school endeavours to provide resource teaching for these students during timetabled Gaeilge lessons. In a minority of cases, it is not possible to withdraw students from Gaeilge lessons for resource teaching and to overcome this difficulty the learning-support team has developed support materials for students to work on during Gaeilge lessons. This good practice is to be commended.

In the case of students with special educational needs who are following the LCA attendance at various modules is a mandatory element of the programme and this creates difficulties in withdrawing students for learning support. However, the school has recognised this issue and works to ensure that students gain their full allocation of support without impact on their attendance. This is to be commended.

The learning-support team members are enthusiastic to support teachers in their work with students with special educational needs. The team members have provided valuable assistance to teachers and there is a high level of ongoing informal communication among teachers and members of the learning-support team. This is to be commended.

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

The school strives to support all students regardless of background. The school has established good links with external agencies such as the VTST, HSE, NEPS, and youth advocacy officer, to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Information on incoming students is gathered during visits to primary schools and this helps to identify any students who may require additional supports.

Where students need financial support the school provides this through financial assistance to purchase uniforms and school requisites and through the book rental scheme, that is run by the parents' association.

The diversity of students includes a significant number of international students, mainly from Brazil. The parents and guardians of these students often do not have good English language skills. The school has shown a high level of awareness of the challenges faced by these parents and guardians and it has actively worked to engage with them. To this end, the school has produced, in Portuguese, a copy of its code of good school behaviour, *Codigo De Bom Compartamento Para A Escola Comunitaria De Gort* and of its standard letters. In addition, the school has employed the services of persons who are fluent in both English and Portuguese and has actively supported the participation in the students' council and the parents' association of international students and international parents and guardians respectively. The school's work in supporting engagement with parents and guardians for whom English is a second language is to be commended.

There is a small number of Traveller students enrolled in the school. The school gains an additional allocation from the Department and accordingly provides supplementary tuition for these students. There is regular contact with the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers and this is good practice.

The school organises a very successful supervised study session in the evenings and on Saturdays. Places are limited in the study and students pay a nominal fee to take part. The school supports students who are economically disadvantaged to participate in the supervised study. In building on this support for students, the school is advised to consider developing a homework support club that runs in tandem with the supervised study and that assists students in the completion of their homework.

## 6.3 Guidance



The school has an allocation of 1.27 Wholetime Teacher Equivalents (WTEs) for Guidance and Counselling. Currently, the school has employed one guidance counsellor. The school intends to use the remaining 0.27 WTEs to employ an additional guidance counsellor fulltime to perform a number of focused tasks over a specific block of time. The use of any allocation given under the general allocation to schools is normally intended to be used throughout the duration of the school year rather than for a focused block of time. Thus, the school is advised to consult with the relevant administrative section to ensure that its proposed use of the allocation meets with the relevant criteria.

The area of Guidance and Counselling is in transition as a newly appointed guidance counsellor has joined the staff following the retirement of the previous guidance counsellor. The approach to Guidance and Counselling is transformational in nature as it seeks to engage all staff in its provision. This approach means that Guidance and Counselling are viewed as a whole-school responsibility and this leads to ongoing development emerging from the professional body of the staff. This approach to engaging staff in developing the guidance and counselling component of the school's provision is to be commended.

The process of drawing up a guidance and counselling plan has begun and significant work has been successfully completed in outlining the areas to be addressed. Guidance and counselling provision in the school is linked with learning support and this creates a supportive cross-disciplinary approach to assisting students on an individual basis. Guidance and counselling are also fundamental to the pastoral care structures in place in the school, and this is to be commended. The ongoing development of the guidance and counselling plan with the formal establishment of links to areas of student support is to be encouraged.

Students benefit from trips to relevant seminars such as those run by FÁS, an information night for parents on trades and PLC courses, and assistance in gaining places on access courses for third level colleges. The guidance counsellor, in cases where students cannot avail of fee-free education, helps students to seek funding to support their continuing education at third level. These support measures are of value to students and are to be commended.

The ongoing development of guidance and counselling provision within the school is undertaken in a committed, professional and enthusiastic manner. One of the initiatives mooted for the coming academic year is the initiation of a formal induction programme for first-year students and this is to be encouraged. Records are maintained of all meetings with students and this is good practice. There are plans to track students' destinations after they leave school and this exercise will provide useful information that can support guidance provision in the school. There are also plans to introduce a career week during the next academic year where all teachers will formally speak with third-year students about the subjects on offer and where members of the students' council will speak with students about their experience of senior cycle. These initiatives will enhance the current guidance and counselling provision for students and their implementation is to be encouraged.

#### 6.4 Pastoral care

A strong sense of pastoral care for students and for staff was evident among the school community during the evaluation. The school's pastoral-care system is described by its draft policy document on pastoral care. The pastoral-care system for students involves teachers, year heads, class tutors, guidance counsellor, chaplain, deputy principal and principal. The system described by the draft document is an effective and efficient system for addressing the pastoral needs of the general student body. The pastoral-care team is working to develop and implement the structures outlined in the policy document in a co-ordinated manner. This is to be encouraged.

The school has appointed a chaplain as provided for in the Deeds of Trust. The role of chaplain is carried out in a committed and professional manner. The chaplain fulfils the roles of providing spiritual and faith guidance to the school community, is a member of the pastoral-care team, prepares prayer services, celebrates liturgical seasons, and has a teaching role. Each of these functions is significant and contributes to the life of the school. The school is sensitive to the need to maintain balance between the teaching duties and other duties of the chaplain and strives to ensure that this occurs.

Pastoral care for staff members is available through mutual support, the services of the chaplain and the staff social committee. These measures have been effective in supporting staff members and are to be commended. In cases where additional support may be required, the school is advised that the Department has put in place an Employee Assistance Service. Details of this service may be found at [www.vhi.ie/dep\\_edu\\_science/index.jsp](http://www.vhi.ie/dep_edu_science/index.jsp).

There is regular communication between the chaplain and teachers concerning the pastoral care of individual students. If a disciplinary issue arises, the chaplain is consulted by teachers to ensure that students gain the necessary supports. Where a student has been suspended, the chaplain makes contact with the student on his or her return to school to provide any support and counselling that may be required.

It is noted that pastoral support for students is seen as a responsibility shared by all staff. The chaplain in collaboration with a team of teachers undertakes co-ordination of the school's pastoral-care system. In developing the current membership of the pastoral-care team, it would be advisable to include the year heads as they have a formal role in student care within the school. It was reported that students are generally made aware of the identity of members of the pastoral-care team by their class tutors. It would be beneficial if a structure were put in place, such as a noticeboard, that included details of pastoral-care arrangements and of personnel involved. This would ensure that all students would have immediate access to information on pastoral care should a personal crisis arise.

The pastoral-care team identified that liaison and co-operation with teachers involved in teaching SPHE supports its work with students. The school has endeavoured to ensure that all teachers involved in teaching SPHE have undertaken appropriate training. The importance of achieving gender balance, in so far as is possible, in the team of teachers involved in SPHE is an issue of which the school is aware.

One of the major challenges facing the pastoral care structures in place in the school is that of catering for the needs of international students, particularly those whose cultural identity is different from that of the majority of students. Currently, the deputy principal plays a large role in providing pastoral support for international students. As reported earlier, a significant number of international students have English language difficulties and are unfamiliar with the culture of Irish schools and Irish culture generally. This means that they are more likely to have greater need for pastoral support and for immediate intervention and action when issues arise. In supporting a focused approach to students' needs, a combination of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Guidance classes could be built into all international students' programmes of study to help them articulate and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing as part of their transition to post-primary school and to Irish culture.

Interview with the pastoral-care team revealed a desire to develop a formal mentoring system for first-year students and this is to be encouraged. This initiative will support students in making the transition from primary to post-primary school and will support international students in making the transition to the Irish education system.

The school has a long tradition of enabling democratic participation by students through an elected students' council. Interview with members of the council revealed that they are articulate, organised, and committed to playing an active part in the life of the school. There is a constitution in place that governs the operation of the council and this is appropriate. The constitution ensures appropriate gender balance on the council and this is to be commended. The school has appointed a member of staff to act as liaison officer between the students' council and the school staff. This shows good support for the council. Members of the students' council play an active part in the life of the school and their very good work is exemplified by their participation at open days, parent-teacher meetings, fundraising events, and in organising the daily cleaning roster for the school. In addition, the council was instrumental in the provision of a commemorative space consisting of a specially commissioned sculpture and surrounding seating. This garden of remembrance serves to acknowledge the memory of past students and creates a peaceful space for

students, staff and visitors. The good work of the council members in envisioning and progressing the provision of this space is acknowledged and commended.

The council communicates with students mainly through a dedicated noticeboard and through announcements made by the principal over the school's intercom system. Developmentally, the council has suggested the idea of a formal mentoring or buddy system for incoming first-year students and this is in keeping with plans by the school's pastoral care team. The implementation of this idea is to be encouraged. In addition, the council has suggested the provision of a comment box for students and the provision of this would further support the open nature of communication within the school. It is noted that council members are drawn from fourth and fifth year students. While acknowledging the open and approachable manner in which council members work it would be supportive of the good work done by the council to consider enabling first, second and third year students to become members of the council.

## 7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A strong sense of respect and unity characterises the daily interactions of members of the school community and this accords with the school's characteristic spirit.
- Inspectors noted excellent rapport among staff and students in the lessons evaluated and observation of informal interactions among staff and students showed that staff-student interactions are characterised by a strong sense of mutual respect.
- The board is proactive in its role and operates in a manner that facilitates open discussion.
- The parents' association plays an active part in the life of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal work well together to provide effective daily leadership for the school. They carry out their duties in a committed and dedicated manner, with the best interests of the school as the focus for their work.
- The very good work done by teachers in the voluntary role of class tutor is acknowledged and is to be highly commended.
- The posts of responsibility assigned to staff members are discharged diligently and in a professional manner.
- There are open communication and transparent decision-making processes in the school.
- There is good support for teachers' continuing professional development.
- The school grounds and classrooms are very clean and are very well maintained and the school is proactive in progressing ongoing improvement of its facilities.
- The school uses its adult education programme in an adaptive manner to meet the perceived learning needs of the community.
- The school plan document that was presented for inspection is a comprehensive document.
- The school development planning process in this school is a collaborative process involving all members of the school community and is coordinated by senior school management in a strategic and proactive manner.
- There is a very broad range of programme options and subject options available to students.
- It is commendable that the school has reflected on the issue of achieving gender-balanced uptake in all subject areas and ensures equality of gender access to all subjects.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities available to students in this school and there are very good levels of student participation in these activities. Teachers' selfless dedication and ongoing contribution to supporting students in taking part in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is acknowledged and is to be highly commended.
- Planning and preparation in the subject areas evaluated was of a generally high quality.
- Teaching and learning were of a generally high quality in the lessons that were observed.
- There is an overarching vision and structured approach to provision for students with special educational needs and this is to be commended.
- The nature of the programme for international students who are experiencing English language difficulties has many beneficial aspects and strives to meet the need to increase students' competence in English as a Second Language (ESL). The programme devised by the school parallels to a great degree the programme provided by Integrate Ireland Language Training (ILLT) that is supported by the Department.
- The team of teachers providing language support is a caring, dedicated group. School management and the teachers timetabled for language-support work are highly commended for their sensitive, student-centred approaches to supporting the needs of international students.
- The learning-support team members have provided valuable assistance to teachers and there is a high level of ongoing informal communication among teachers and members of the learning-support team.
- The school provides good supports for students from disadvantaged, minority and other groups.
- There is good support for students in the area of Guidance and Counselling and work in this area is transformational in nature and is led in a strategic and enthusiastic manner.
- A strong sense of pastoral care for students and for staff was evident among the school community during the evaluation.
- The school has a long tradition of enabling democratic participation by students through an elected students' council and the current students' council plays an active part in the life of the school.

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

- The school intends to further review the schedule of posts in consultation with staff and it is recommended that this proceed as a priority.
- Due to the enactment of the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* review of the school's health and safety statement is recommended. Review as needs arise coupled with an annual review is best practice and will enable the school to ensure that it continues to meet its obligations under the relevant legislation.
- The current review of the school's admission policy should include consideration of the wording of the policy in relation to enrolment of students with special educational needs and so assure that the policy continues to provide for equality of access for students with special educational needs as required by the *Education Act 1998, Section 21(2)*.
- In supporting the work of the school where all students are encouraged to participate in Physical Education, it is recommended that the school's timetabling arrangements be reviewed to ensure that all students participate in Physical Education each week.
- In building on the good level of ICT facilities in the school and the high level of support available to staff in using ICT, it is recommended that the school plan for further integration of ICT in teaching and learning processes.
- In building on the school's good practices, the school is advised to formalise a strategy to encourage a more gender-balanced uptake across the curriculum.
- In developing its current good practices, it is recommended that the school consider how it will best adapt its current programme of language support to reflect the framework described by ILLT.

- The initiation of a formal induction programme for first-year students is to be encouraged.

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

## 8. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of English – 26 January 2007
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – 25 January 2007
- Subject Inspection of Music – 25 January 2007
- Subject Inspection of Material Technology (Wood) and Construction Studies – 23 January 2007
- Subject Inspection of Technical Graphics and Technical Drawing – 24 January 2007

## Appendix

### 8.1 School Response to the Report

#### Submitted by the Board of Management

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

The Board of Management of Gort Community School was very pleased with the substance of the Report. Since the Report was first issued on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2007, copies of the 75 page report were made available to all the various interested parties – staff and Management, Parents, Students Council and Trustees all of whom share in the life of what is Gort Community School. The overriding reaction was that it was a very positive and affirming document which acknowledged the great efforts made on all sides to make Gort Community School the successful school that this report highlights. Since the school first came into operation in September 1995, everybody has worked effortlessly to make the school a central fulcrum of the community where its core business, educating the youth of our area, is done in a meaningful and effective way.

The central tenet is that this business is imparted in an atmosphere based on order and mutual respect and these core principles are very much in evidence from the content of the report.

It was singularly significant that no changes or alterations, corrections or clarifications were requested to be made to the original Report which was drawn up by the Inspectorate. This spoke volumes not just for the work that goes on day by day at our school but also for the sensitive and non threatening manner in which the seven Inspectors did their work. These Inspectors came into our place of work for one week during the last week of January 2007 to observe, analyse and report on their findings. They would have witnessed an active and vibrant go ahead school getting on with its business with the activity and engagement that comes in a co-education school of over 700 teenagers.

Most importantly, the teaching staff felt acknowledged and affirmed for their efforts both inside and outside the classroom. The report referred to... *the teachers selfless dedication and ongoing contribution to supporting students* – P.12. The Board and the Parents Association were both praised for their proactive involvement in the life and activity of the school. Several mentions are made in the report of the warm atmosphere in the school and the cordial relations evident around the school - a number of Inspectors commented on the excellent rapport that was evident in all the lessons evaluated. P. 13.

The Report is wide ranging and comprehensive and examines and comments on all aspects of the working school. Significantly, those students who are different in any way from the mainstream also came in for special mention and the report states that... *the school provides good supports for students from disadvantaged, minority or other groups.*

Finally, because our school seeks to provide a warm and caring place of work for everybody, notwithstanding the many challenges which we all face on a daily basis, it was most heartening that one of the strengths of the school was its collective sense of duty to the well being of all. Thus the report stated... *there is a strong sense of pastoral care for students and for staff which was evident among the school community during the evaluation.*

At the end of the day, the school is a stronger entity for having undergone the process of Whole School Evaluation.

**Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

Following receipt of the Report, all the partners had to take stock of its contents and there were many recommendations given throughout the report. Some of these recommendations are highlighted on pages 21 and 22. A few of the main items have already been acted upon e.g. amending our Admission Policy to take account of the requirements of Special Educational needs whilst the Safety Statement for the school is currently under review. The school intends to have a formal induction programme and day for first year students next August before all the other students return to school.

The matter of giving access to Physical Education for all and especially to encourage senior students to participate has also been discussed a number of times at Board level since the report was first issued. Whilst the school in general is very committed to a programme of Extra Curricular Activities for all and this has been acknowledged by the Inspectorate, it will take further measures to encourage senior students, especially girls to become more active. To this end, one of our new appointees for the next school year will be a Physical Education teacher. During the summer vacation, the school is also looking to upgrade our Information Technology facilities as suggested in one of the recommendations.

One of the recommendations from the Inspectorate following the inspection of Technical Drawing was that the various Technology Teachers (T4) should be meeting with School Management to...*discuss and plan for the overall accommodation of the Technology subjects in the school.* This process had actually already started at the commencement of the 2006/07 school year a long time in advance of the Whole School Evaluation.

The school will use this document as a reference guide to improve going forward into the future. There are a good number of suggestions and routes to improvement dotted throughout the report and these will be taken cognisance of as we move into a new school year and beyond.