

**Report to the Department of Education of the independent
panel appointed to investigate the circumstances in
De La Salle College, Belfast**

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Glossary of abbreviations used in this Report

CCEA Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

CCMS Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

DE Department of Education

EA Education Authority

EF Entitlement Framework

ETI Education & Training Inspectorate

SLT Senior Leadership Team

SPR Strategic Plan for Renewal

VES Voluntary Exit Scheme

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraph Nos</u>
Summary	Pages 1 – 5
Introduction and Terms of Reference	1.1 – 1.5
Scoping and Methodology	2.1 – 2.4
Stakeholders' Views	3.1 – 3.3
Panel Considerations and Recommendations	4.1 – 4.3
• Changes, incidents and issues	5.1
2011 - School Inspection Report	6.1 – 6.2
School Principal Changes - Acting Appointments 2012-2014	7.1 – 7.2
Internal Audit Reports	8.1 – 8.6
Appointment of Principal	9.1 – 9.5
Reconstitutions of Board of Governors	10.1 – 10.4
Safeguarding Incident and Subsequent Action	11.1 – 11.4
Strategic Plan for Renewal Process	12.1 – 12.8
Industrial Relations	13.1 – 13.8
Communications	14.1 – 14.3
Staff Structures and Relationships	15.1 – 15.6
• Impact on Students	16.1 – 16.4
• Concerns of Parents / the Wider Community	17.1 – 17.4
• Wider Compliance Issues	18.1 – 18.5
Moving Forward	19.1 – 19.2
• Skill Set and Stability for School Leadership	20.1
ETI Inspection	21.1 – 21.2
Board of Governors: Review of Skill Set	22.1
Early Retirement Package	23.1
Warning Signs Checklist / Early Intervention	24.1
Summary of Recommendations	
Appendix 1 - Record of panel meetings	Page 43
Appendix 2 - Record of submissions received	Page 44

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Summary

Since early November 2015, De La Salle College was a frequent news item in media and press coverage. There were reports of industrial disputes, teacher absences, conflict and relationship breakdowns between the school's Board of Governors, Principal and staff, protests by parents and students. In April 2016 the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) appointed an Associate Principal to support the school leadership.

By the end of April 2016 events had deteriorated to the point where the Minister for Education appointed this independent panel with the remit ***“to undertake an investigation into all the factors and circumstances that gave rise to the deterioration of relationships within the school, the wider impact of this on the pupils’ education and well-being, and the impact on the wider community served by the school and to make recommendations to ensure the school’s future going forward”***.

The Department identified the following areas to be covered by our investigation but gave the panel scope to broaden or vary these:

- the implementation of key educational policies, programmes and procedures;
- staff welfare and staff working relationships;
- the role of senior leadership and senior management within the school;
- the operation of the governance arrangements in respect of the school; and
- the impact on the teaching and learning and the pupils’ attainment and their general well-being.

The Minister requested that all those involved with the governance of the school, as well as pupils, parents, staff and their representatives had the opportunity to express their views to the panel. Appendix 1 of the report provides a record of the panel’s 28 meetings with stakeholders and at Appendix 2 a record of submissions received.

In the extensive representations received it was advocated that the panel should investigate a very wide range of incidents and issues going back more than three years. However, we were tasked by the Minister to complete our investigation and report by early summer. The panel therefore adopted the following approach.

We considered carefully the chronology of incidents and issues, taking the 2011 School Inspection Report as a starting point; and then we identified those incidents, issues and resulting consequences, which, in the panel's view, impacted on and contributed significantly to the deterioration of working relationships in the school.

We also decided to structure the report on the basis of the sequence of particular incidents and issues. Using this approach, and drawing on our analysis of particular incidents and issues, we developed recommendations to address the current situation in De La Salle College and also to seek to put systems and processes in place to prevent similar circumstances occurring in other schools. The panel is satisfied that, within the limited time available, our recommendations cover the five areas identified by the Department.

We would not understate the seriousness of the circumstances in this school. There was no single cause or factor that led to the level of deterioration in working relationships. As reflected in the content of the report, the panel finds that a combination of a sequence of incidents and issues, along with some systemic weaknesses, and in the processes of the responsible authorities, were all contributory factors. These included:

- prolonged periods of acting appointments in key school leadership posts and the absence of any structured support or monitoring systems in such circumstances;
- critical internal audit reports;
- conflicts and differences involving the Board of Governors, Principal, senior school leaders and staff;
- limited support systems in place for new Principals and Vice-Principals, particularly in the context of a school already experiencing difficulties;
- reasons and processes for the handling of a reconstitution of the Board of Governors were not open and transparent causing deterioration in trust and confidence within the school community;
- absence of established mechanisms for introducing new Boards of Governors to the school and integration with wider school leadership and staff;
- following a safeguarding incident, developments involving all staff which were not in keeping with Child Protection and Safeguarding policies;

- complaints of lack of openness and transparency with communications within the school at all levels contributing to rumours and perceptions;
- concerns and complaints about a lack of transparency and equality of opportunity for all staff for internal promotion and development opportunities; and
- conflicts between school Governors, school leaders and staff impacting on students and parents.

Consistent with our finding that there was no single cause of the school's circumstances, the panel does not find that any single person or party was responsible for the breakdown in the school's relationships. We therefore urge parties to reflect on our analysis and recommendations. Two points need to be made.

Firstly, the panel considers that it was evident that there were difficulties developing in De La Salle College well before the deterioration to the current circumstances. And, while the panel accepts that our analysis of the position has the benefit of hindsight, nevertheless, it is our view that earlier focused intervention by CCMS was warranted.

Secondly, as we state in the report, the panel considered it was unacceptable that relationship breakdowns within a school at governance or teacher levels should impact on pupils. Hence we have made the strong recommendation that all must commit to making the school uncompromisingly 'child-centred' and put the education of the students firmly at its heart.

We have made some 40 recommendations throughout the report (and summarised at the end). These require actions by CCMS, Board of Governors, the Education Authority (EA), Department of Education (DE), Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the trade unions, school leaders and staff. In formulating our recommendations we drew on the recognised characteristics of successful schools which are generally agreed to be:

- that their core purpose is child-centred;
- that they concentrate on what happens in the classroom and aspire to have the highest quality of learning and teaching;
- that they have effective leadership at all levels; and
- that they communicate regularly with their local community.

We have categorised recommendations as 'A' - to be implemented immediately to retrieve De La Salle College from its current circumstances; and 'B' - to be implemented by the appropriate authorities as soon as practicable. Many of the recommendations in the second category should contribute to ensuring that systems and processes are in place which should prevent the current exceptional circumstances of De La Salle arising in any other school.

We heard strong testimonies to the commitment of teachers to pupils, parents and their community and the reciprocal commitment of the community to the school. The panel is satisfied that the exceptional circumstances that currently face De La Salle College can be overcome, but equally, to achieve this goal successfully will require exceptional measures and the commitment of all to move forward.

It is imperative that the process of restoring De La Salle College to a successful school commences with urgency – in this respect the critical recommendations include:

- CCMS and the Board of Governors should ensure there are stable school leadership arrangements in place throughout the 2016/17 school year with a robust support programme in place for the Principal in post in De La Salle. (recommendation 4)
- CCMS and EA should facilitate the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school on a full-time basis for the next school year 2016/17. (recommendation 19)
- CCMS and the Board of Governors must immediately establish a clear vision and ethos for the school which is uncompromisingly 'child-centred' and puts the education of the students firmly at its heart. (recommendation 26)
- the Strategic Plan for Renewal process must be reinvigorated and continued with the first priority to contribute to developing a School Development Plan. (recommendation 15)
- the Board of Governors, school management and the trade unions should establish immediately a school based Joint Consultative Committee to develop positive and constructive engagement on day to day industrial relations issues within the school. (recommendation 18)

- ETI should schedule a full inspection in De La Salle as soon as practicable but also taking into account the process of implementation of this panel's other recommendations for immediate action. (recommendation 37)
- CCMS and the Board of Governors should undertake a review of the skills and experiences of the current Governors and consider appointing additional Governors to meet identified gaps in skills and experience. (recommendation 38)
- CCMS and EA should urgently consider the scope to utilise the current schemes such as the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES), Investing in the Workforce, and/or other sources, to fund measures to support necessary staff structure changes. (recommendation 39)

The panel urges all the parties to act on our recommendations to enable De La Salle College to overcome the unacceptable circumstances that developed, and to be a centre of excellence in teaching and learning for all the students and a good place to work for all staff.

Sir Robert Salisbury
Marie-Thérèse McGivern
John Corey

Introduction and Terms of Reference

1.1 On 28 April 2016 the Minister for Education appointed this independent panel to investigate the current situation at De La Salle College, Belfast. In the preceding months there were a number of media reports of disputes between school staff and management plus parent and pupil protests.

1.2 The Minister tasked us to ***“investigate the circumstances in the college and to make recommendations to ensure the college’s future going forward”***; he also stated that our investigation would give ***“pupils, parents, staff and their representatives and all those involved with the governance of the school the opportunity to express their view”***. We were asked to report back by early summer.

1.3 The Department of Education provided the following terms of reference:

“An independent investigation into all the factors and circumstances that gave rise to the deterioration of relationships within the school, the wider impact of this on the pupils’ education and well-being, and the impact on the wider community served by the school”.

1.4 The Department advised that the scope of the investigation would cover the following:

- (i) the implementation of key educational policies, programmes and procedures;
- (ii) staff welfare and staff working relationships;
- (iii) the role of senior leadership and senior management within the school;
- (iv) the operation of the governance arrangements in respect of the school; and
- (v) the impact on the teaching and learning and the pupils’ attainment and their general well-being.

1.5 We commenced the investigation in May 2016. We accepted two parameters to our work. Firstly, we were tasked to undertake this investigation during the period when hundreds of pupils would be undertaking their GCSE and GCE examinations. We therefore sought to ensure that our investigation needed to minimise any disruption

to school students, their families, teachers and the wider community. Secondly the Strategic Plan for Renewal process, involving the Board of Governors, CCMS, the trade unions and teaching and non-teaching staff, was already underway; with the stated central purpose to ***“restore De La Salle to be a centre of excellence in learning for all of our young people and a good place to work for all of the staff”***. The panel accepted that this process should continue during the investigation.

Scoping and Methodology

2.1 The Department of Education provided the panel with some background papers on the circumstances in the college. The panel commenced the investigation by arranging a series of initial meetings with key stakeholders including CCMS, representatives of the Board of Governors, the Principal/Associate Principals/Vice-Principals and the trade unions. All participants were invited to:

- advise the panel of their views on the key problems and when these commenced;
- provide their views on the critical issues for investigation, and
- any other views on the investigation process.

2.2 All participants provided substantial volumes of information and documents. Following the initial meetings the panel proceeded to meet with all other key stakeholders including the college’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members, representatives of the pupils, the Concerned Parents Committee, former and current school Governors, the CCEA, ETI and school trade union representatives. In the period from 25 May to 22 July 2016 the panel held 28 separate meetings with participants – see Appendix 1.

2.3 The panel also received requests for meetings from individual teachers and others connected with the school. However, as we were tasked by the Minister to complete our report by early summer, it was not possible for the panel to schedule meetings with all school staff individually or with others before the end of the summer term. Nevertheless we agreed that all who wished to provide their views to the panel should have the opportunity to do so. The panel therefore issued a template response form to all staff and others to provide views on three generic questions and/or to provide their own written submissions. In total the panel received 55 written submissions and a summary record of the sources of submissions is at Appendix 2.

2.4 It is important to state that the panel is fully satisfied that all the submissions received, both oral and written, provided sufficient information on the current circumstances in the school to enable us to make the recommendations set out in this report.

Stakeholders' Views

3.1 The panel conducted its meetings on an informal basis which was accepted by all the participants. We encouraged participants to be open in providing their views and documents; we assured participants that the panel's report would not record any individual's personal views or comments but may attribute points raised to organisations, groups or positions as appropriate. The panel records its appreciation to all without exception for their openness and candour in their submissions to us.

3.2 The panel heard differing views on the history and causes of the current circumstances in the school and on the steps needed to achieve resolution. Some cited historic difficulties from the merger of the former junior and senior schools in 2008. Others advocated that the panel's considerations should include issues from 2013 with the reconstitution of the previous Board of Governors and the appointment of the new Board of Governors in January 2015. The bulk of the submissions received focused on the actions of the Board of Governors, the Principal, the Senior Leadership Team and the trade unions on a sequence of issues and incidents from April 2014 onwards.

3.3 The panel accepts that all participants made their submissions to us in good faith and with the interests of the school at heart. All participants agreed that there was a serious breakdown of working relationships within the school, and critically that the circumstances in the school impacted substantially on the pupils. As to the causes of this breakdown, the panel received submissions on many incidents and issues. There were conflicting accounts as participants understandably advocated that their own actions were appropriate and others were at fault.

Panel Considerations and Recommendations

4.1 It was clear to the panel at an early stage that there was no single cause of the serious deterioration in the normal working relationships that are necessary for any school to undertake its purpose. The submissions received confirmed that the deterioration of relationships in this college developed from a wide range of issues and incidents stretching back more than three years. Indeed new issues continued to occur during our investigation.

4.2 However two other key points were very clear to the panel at an early stage:

- it was imperative that actions to resolve the current circumstances in De La Salle College needed to be taken with urgency and be underway when the school reopens in September 2016; and
- for this panel to prolong its investigation process would be counter-productive and not in the best interests of all affected by the events, particularly for the pupils (and incoming pupils) and their parents, and for teaching and non-teaching staff.

4.3 In order to meet these imperatives, the panel could not possibly investigate in detail each and every incident and issue which participants raised. The approach we took was to consider carefully the chronology of incidents and issues starting with the 2011 School Inspection Report. We identified a number of particular incidents, issues and resulting consequences, which, in this panel's view, impacted on and contributed significantly to the breakdown of working relationships. We addressed each of these from the perspective of developing recommendations as follows:

- 'A' to be implemented immediately to retrieve De La Salle College from its current circumstances; and
- 'B' to be implemented by all appropriate authorities, in particular CCMS, as soon as practicable and also to ensure that systems and processes are in place to prevent the current circumstances of De La Salle arising in any other school.

The recommendations below are categorised accordingly.

Changes, Incidents and Issues

5.1 The first media coverage of issues within the school was in November 2015. It was reported that a third of the teachers were absent in an apparent industrial relations dispute over the school's handling of an incident. However, the evidence to the panel from many parties was that this incident was not the starting point for the school's current circumstances. As noted earlier we received extensive oral and written submissions on a range of specific incidents and contested issues going back to 2013 and earlier.

2011 - School Inspection Report

6.1 In the Education and Training Inspectorate report dated November 2011 De La Salle College achieved an overall finding of 'very good'. For some areas inspected, the school's performance was evaluated as 'outstanding', notably for leadership and management, and for the quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils. Furthermore, and significantly in the context of some representations made to us, the inspection report records that there was

“A very good quality SDP (which meets the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005) identifies, through consultation, a range of appropriate priorities to meet the needs of all pupils. The implementation of the SDP priorities is effectively and rigorously monitored by the Principal and SLT, and challenged robustly and effectively by the Governors”.

However the panel also noted that the School Inspection Report recorded that ***“a small number of teachers and support staff reported some concerns in respect of communication and management”***.

6.2 As many of the parties argued, this inspection report was evidence that De La Salle College was a very good and well run college in 2011. This therefore provided a logical starting point for our consideration of the significant changes, incidents and/or issues that occurred following that report and were contributory factors to the current circumstances.

School Principal Changes - Acting Appointments 2012-2014

7.1 A year after the 2011 inspection report the school entered a prolonged period of acting appointments at Principal and Vice-Principal levels. In December 2012 the former Principal began a period of long term sickness absence. An acting Principal was appointed and the Board of Governors' Annual Report 2013 records that there were two Vice-Principals. The acting Principal left on 31 March 2014 to take up appointment as the Principal of another school. One of the Vice-Principals was appointed as acting Principal up until June 2014 when a new substantive Principal was appointed under the CCMS Appointment Scheme.

7.2 As a general comment the panel recognises that many schools may have similar experiences of temporary appointments because of long term absences for illness or other circumstances. Nevertheless, such periods of uncertainty and acting appointments to key school leadership posts are not ideal. When these periods are prolonged and

temporary working practices have to be put in place there are clearly consequences for the school. These situations can give rise to the expectations of career progression for staff within the school and difficulties in dismantling practices that have become established when a new external Principal is appointed. These circumstances can be significant challenges for any person appointed as the next school Principal, especially when individuals will have gained experience of the Principal's role and may have firm views on how this should operate. Managing these relationships require very high quality leadership skills. The panel considers that CCMS and EA should have policies and protocols in place to monitor and support schools in such circumstances.

Recommendation

1.(B) CCMS and EA should review their policies and protocols for monitoring and supporting the effective management of schools where there are prolonged acting appointments to Principal and Vice-Principal posts.

Internal Audit Reports

8.1 In January 2013 a school audit was undertaken by the Internal Audit Service of the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). This audit was part of the normal accountability processes to ensure that there are proper control systems in place for schools with delegated budgets. When this audit was due to commence the Chairperson of the Board of Governors raised concerns with internal audit of potential fraudulent activity and Internal Audit Service commenced a separate investigation into these concerns.

8.2 The panel received copies of the BELB Internal Audit Service reports dated August 2013 and September 2013. The reports identified serious concerns in relation to the financial management of the college including potential fraud and the audit report made some 27 recommendations. We also received a copy of the Audit Service follow up report dated March 2014. This review report confirmed that the Finance Committee of the Board of Governors met on a weekly basis until new systems were implemented. The report further records that ***“measures had been introduced to adequately address all of the recommendations made”*** and that ***‘Internal audit recognises the huge focus of management’s efforts during the previous year on implementing change across the college’s range of administrative systems’***.

8.3 A subsequent audit investigation, requested by the school Principal, commenced in November 2014 and related to the management of the Sports Complex and use of

sports hall funds. This audit report dated March 2015 raised further concerns; the report stated:

“In order to avoid a repeat of the previous failings within the school, the newly reconstituted BoGs need to address the culture of hospitality”

and that the Board of Governors (through its finance sub-committee) should

“ensure that all school funds are appropriately managed and scrutinised”.

8.4 It is a matter of record, that the former Board of Governors committed very substantial time and effort to ensure the school addressed the Audit recommendations. We were advised, however, that no information relating to the earlier Audit reports could be communicated to the school’s Senior Leadership Team or staff; the panel was informed that this strict confidentiality was maintained because of pending legal cases. The panel considers that this absence of communications, coupled with the subsequent Audit Report in 2015, gave rise to rumours and perceptions that were contributory factors in the deterioration of relationships. The panel considers that it would have been normal practice for a School’s Senior Leadership Team to be appraised of any serious internal audit report, if necessary in confidence, and having due regard to any personal conflicts of interest.

8.5 We were also surprised to hear that neither the Principal appointed in June 2014, or those individuals appointed as school governors in January 2015, were given any prior awareness of the Internal Audit Reports. The panel feels that a possible contributory factor may be that school governors’ final responsibility for the school’s financial management and budget may not be sufficiently highlighted in recruitment literature for new Boards of Governors.

8.6 The panel addresses general compliance issues at paragraphs 14.1-14.3 below. We make the following general recommendations relating to the handling of future school audit reports:

Recommendations

2.(B) CCMS and EA should review the information published on the role and responsibilities of Boards of Governors to ensure that their responsibility for the school’s financial management and budget is prominently and clearly stated in all relevant literature.

3.(B) CCMS and EA should develop and make available to Boards of Governors good practice protocols for the handling of adverse Internal Audit reports including the timely dissemination of appropriate information to school staff and to parents through the school's annual report.

Appointment of Principal

9.1 Following the CCMS appointments process completed in April 2014 a new Principal was selected for appointment. The submissions received indicate that a conflict developed at an early stage involving the Board of Governors and Senior Leadership Team members. We heard accounts about a proposal to appoint two substantive Vice-Principals at that time. The Principal confirmed, prior to taking up her post on 10 June 2014, that she had requested the Board of Governors to appoint two Vice-Principals – in line with CCMS processes these posts would be publicly advertised. A letter dated 20 May 2014, signed by all members of the SLT referred to a meeting between the Chairman of the Board of Governors and SLT held on 12 May 2014; as well as challenging the apparent rush to appoint two Vice-Principals this letter signalled a serious breakdown in relationships between the then Chairman of the Board of Governors and the SLT. By June 2014 a subsequent decision was taken to defer the competition and withdraw the public advertisement for the two Vice-Principal posts. This meant that the school continued with acting Vice-Principals for the whole of the next academic year 2014/2015 - a further extensive period of temporary appointments in two key leadership posts.

9.2 In the panel's view the handling of this initial conflict over the proposal to appoint the two new Vice-Principals unfortunately appears to have set a tone for working relationships and impacted on trust and confidence between the Board of Governors, Principal, members of the SLT and staff. We consider that these working relationships were never satisfactorily recovered and remained an underlying factor in subsequent issues and incidents.

9.3 Coupled with this difficult start, the new Principal was taking up the post following the prolonged period of acting appointments in the leadership posts. As the panel has already commented in paragraph 7.2 above such situations present major challenges. It is the panel's view that successful management requires:

- the Board of Governors, Principal and senior leaders, within their respective roles, working together with trust and confidence;

- a strong induction and support programme in place for the Principal taking up the post in such circumstances; and
- significant experience and leadership skills at Principal level.

9.4 From the submissions received it is clear that all of the above elements were not in place when the Principal commenced employment in June 2014. CCMS was the responsible authority and fully aware of the difficulties and developing conflict within the school. It is our view that CCMS should have been much more directly engaged at that point. Furthermore the two Vice-Principals appointed in the 2015/16 school year found themselves taking up their posts in a difficult unsettled environment. In such circumstance new Vice-Principals also require provision for support. The learning point from this failing is that CCMS and EA should critically review their policies and practices to ensure that there are mechanisms and resources available to provide the requisite support for all newly appointed Principals and Vice-Principals, having regard to the circumstances of the school.

9.5 For De La Salle College entering the new school year, CCMS and the Board of Governors must take immediate actions to put in place stable school leadership that will continue unchanged throughout the 2016/17 year. They must also ensure that there is a robust support programme to support the Principal. In the exceptional circumstances of De La Salle the panel further recommends that this support should include the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school on a full-time basis for the next school year 2016/17. The need to retain this post as a special measure for a longer period should be reviewed in June 2017 (see also paragraph 12.5 and recommendation 19).

Recommendations

4.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should ensure that there are stable school leadership arrangements in place throughout the 2016/17 school year with a robust support programme put in place for the Principal in post in De La Salle. This support should include the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school for the next school year 2016/17.

5.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that there is a formal and structured induction programme for all new Principals and Vice-Principals which includes the provision of mentoring/coaching and access to expert advice on a range of issues.

6.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that there are mechanisms and resources in place to support newly appointed Principals and particularly where the preceding school leadership posts had been covered by acting appointments for prolonged periods.

7.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that the Board of Governors fulfil their duties to:

- **review the performance of the Principal annually in meeting the school's policy and objectives, as determined by the Board of Governors; and**
- **ensure that the professional development and performance of all teachers is reviewed annually in accordance with the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Scheme.**

Reconstitutions of Board of Governors

10.1 The panel noted that CCMS issued a circular 2013/23 dated 18 November 2013 requesting school Trustees to forward names of appointments and nominations for the Boards of Governors to the local Diocesan Education Office by November 2013. At the school's Board of Governors meeting in December 2013, it was decided to reconstitute to a nine member Board. Nominations were submitted in December 2013 and subsequently Teacher and Parent Governors were elected. This Board of Governors continued in office without challenge or query to December 2014.

10.2 Submissions to the panel indicated that CCMS decided in December to initiate a reconstitution of the De La Salle Board of Governors. The panel did not see evidence of any prior discussion with the existing Board of Governors about the decision to reconstitute the Board. Further, the papers available confirm that there were no attempts made to arrange any form of organised transition and/or hand over from one Board of Governors to the new Board of Governors who were appointed by January 2015. Furthermore we received evidence that there was not timely communications to individuals who were not being reappointed. The panel considers that this was not an acceptable way to treat people who had given their time and undertaken work on a voluntary basis.

10.3 The panel finds that the poor handling of the reconstitution of the college's governing body in January 2015 did add to the developing difficult working relationships within the school community. The members of the former Board of Governors clearly believed that the reconstitution of the Board undertaken in December 2013 met the

requirements of the CCMS circular. Consequently the absence of any prior discussions with that Board created suspicion and mistrust about the purpose of the reconstitution process.

10.4 The panel noted that the incoming members of the reconstituted Board of Governors did not appear to have been briefed on the range of circumstances in the school prior to their formal appointments. There was no organised handover nor, did we see any evidence of a robust and substantial induction programme for incoming governors. To carry out their duties in an exemplary way, school governors require access to training and support especially in difficult areas such as audit and human resources.

Recommendations

8.(A) CCMS should acknowledge the contribution of members of the former Board of Governors who had contributed significant time and effort to address issues in De La Salle following the 2013 Audit Reports.

9.(B) CCMS should review its policies and processes when initiating a reconstitution of a school's Board of Governors to ensure that the school's current Governors are fully informed of the reasons for the reconstitution and how the process will be undertaken.

10.(B) To ensure that the fundamental and respective roles of the Board of Governors and school leaders are clearly understood by all, CCMS/EA should develop an appropriate module to ensure that all reconstituted Boards of Governors receive training alongside the Principal and senior leaders, before beginning their tenure of office and at regular intervals throughout their term of office. This would clarify for all parties their central purpose, roles and responsibilities and their operational boundaries.

11.(B) As part of the induction programme it should also be standard practice that reconstituted Boards of Governors meet with all staff at an early date and engage on a regular basis with staff.

Safeguarding Incident and Subsequent Action

11.1 A safeguarding incident on 14 October 2015 became a significant turning point. Flowing from this incident, there were several developments which significantly disrupted the normal functioning of the school:

- the submission of a letter to the Board of Governors and Principal dated 21 October 2015 signed by 115 staff;
- a demonstration on 23 October 2015 which involved a number of teachers standing at the door of their classrooms for up to 30 minutes;
- the Board of Governors' address to all staff on 2 November 2015 and reactions of staff;
- an increase in the level of teachers absent on sick leave and consequential disruption to classes; and
- media reports of the disputes in De La Salle College.

11.2 The originating incident was subject to separate legal proceedings, and remains subject to ongoing employment procedures. Given this position it was not appropriate for this panel to investigate or make any comment on the specifics of that incident.

11.3 The panel received extensive submissions about the handling of the aftermath of this incident and the developments noted above. On the one hand school management considered actions by staff were unacceptable. On the other hand, we heard that the staff's response was in part strongly motivated by growing concerns that the school management would no longer support any staff member in dealing with difficult situations with pupils. There were claims that some staff were pressurised and intimidated to sign the letter dated 21 October 2015 and participate in the demonstration on 23 October 2015. We heard equally strong rebuttals of such claims. It was very clear to the panel that this particular chain of developments pitched the college into the situation of a serious breakdown of normal working relationships between the Board of Governors, the Principal, Senior Leadership Team and staff.

11.4 The panel concluded that a detailed examination of the various incidents that followed the safeguarding case would not help with moving forward. Overall, however, the panel records that it is not in keeping with normal standards and requirements for the management of a child protection/safeguarding incident for a wide group of staff and others to become involved in discussions and actions relating to that incident. It is also our view that many of the actions and reactions by all parties were influenced by the pre-existing underlying lack of trust and confidence in school working relationships. Furthermore the panel considers that the handling of the issues exposed a number of systemic deficiencies and weaknesses within the school and inherent within the

complexity of roles and responsibilities of CCMS, EA and the Board of Governors including:

- at that time apparent unresolved issues around the operation of the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy within the college;
- the absence of a critical incident strategy and procedures which should include protocols for communication to the school community but respecting confidentiality for those directly affected;
- the involvement of two separate employing authorities and the requirement on college management to take advice and direction from both bodies; and
- the apparent absence of any prior communications or engagement between the Board of Governors appointed in January 2015 and the school staff until the meeting on 3 November 2015.

We therefore make the following recommendations.

Recommendations

12.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should ensure that the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and procedures are fully updated and available to all school staff. The Board of Governors should also ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff receive appropriate training in the policy on a regular basis.

13.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should develop a 'Critical Incident' strategy to address any such incidents that may arise. This strategy should include details of responsible personnel for actions and protocols on communications to the school community. Critical Incident contact information should be displayed appropriately within the school.

14.(B) CCMS and EA should review current protocols and practices on arrangements for the provision of Human Resource advice and support to maintained schools on any incidents and/or issues that affect both teaching and non-teaching staff and to consider scope to agree a single source of advice to the school management where, in particular cases, this may be necessary.

Strategic Plan for Renewal Process

12.1 The incidents covered in the preceding section brought immediate and intense trade union involvement. The panel recognises that the trade unions did take immediate steps to seek to address the situation in the college.

12.2 There were discussions on 11 November 2015 involving the trade unions, CCMS and the Board of Governors. Subsequently, the teacher trade unions - INTO, ATL and NASUWT - put forward substantial written submissions, to the Board of Governors, with comprehensive and constructive proposals to address the situation in the college. The outcome was that the employer (CCMS/Board of Governors) and the trade unions were able to achieve an agreement on a comprehensive Strategic Plan for Renewal (SPR) and detailed implementation processes with the objective ***“to restore De La Salle to be a centre of excellence in learning for all our young people and a good place to work for all the staff”***.

12.3 The SPR timetable provided for the processes to commence in January 2016 and to be progressed during the second term to achieve the implementation of Action Plan outcomes by May 2016. This timetable was not met – in fact the processes did not get underway until May 2016. By the end of June 2016 there was limited progress. The submissions to the panel indicate that following the agreement on the SPR, the Principal raised concerns about the process with the Board of Governors. By March 2016 the INTO trade union moved to a formal dispute situation alleging the circumvention of the workings of the Strategic Plan – this is addressed further in the industrial relations section below.

12.4 The panel accepts that the SPR did offer the potential to retrieve the situation in the school within an industrial relations setting. The panel is therefore strongly recommending that the SPR must continue subject to the following comments.

12.5 Firstly, the panel appreciates that the SPR’s operational structures and levels were a product of negotiations and designed to accommodate the respective roles and authorities of the parties. The panel also appreciates that the agreement to have seven Action Plan areas was a genuine effort to address all issues. However, the panel considered that the complexity of the Group structures and the scale of issues to be progressed simultaneously, may have been detrimental to quick progress. We consider that the parties should consult and agree on streamlining of the Group structure and develop clear sequential priorities for Action Plan areas, whilst taking into account all the recommendations in this report. The allocation of an experienced Human Resources

specialist to the school (recommendation 19) will provide assistance in managing the processes.

12.6 Secondly, for future decision making, the panel considers that the college needs to strengthen its management information systems with a strong data platform tracking performance at school, departmental and course levels. The collection and analysis of data is an essential part of running a successful school. This should be developed as part of the Strategic Plan for Renewal.

12.7 Thirdly, in the course of our investigation the issue of a School Development Plan was raised many times – which we consider later at paragraphs 18.1 - 18.5. As a first priority the SPR process should contribute to developing the School Development Plan. (see also recommendation 33). As well as complying with the clear statutory requirement to have a current School Development Plan, the panel considers that the school would benefit from having in place a clear strategic framework vision setting out the proposed direction of the college over a longer number of years – long-term goals based on what the college perceives to be its strengths and weaknesses and how each can be dealt with. Many also raised with us the importance of the Lasallian ethos and values. The panel recommends that the Strategic Plan for Renewal should include the development of a longer term vision along with clear parameters for behaviours in the school between staff and students and between staff themselves.

12.8 To be the vehicle for restoring excellence the panel considers that the SPR process will also require the application of best practice in project management and to be resourced appropriately.

Recommendations

15.(A) The Strategic Plan for Renewal process must be reinvigorated and continued in line with best practice in project management and resourced appropriately. In particular CCMS, the Board of Governors and the trade unions should consult to review a streamlining of the Group structure and to prioritise Action Plan areas, whilst taking into account all the recommendations in this report. As a first priority the SPR process should contribute to developing the School Development Plan. (see also recommendation 33)

16.(A) The panel recommends that a strong management information platform to assist with decision making is required to be developed as part of the Strategic Plan for Renewal.

17.(B) The panel recommends that a set of values/behaviours defining the De La Salle way is included in the Strategic Plan for Renewal and as part of this process to develop a meaningful vision for at least the next 5 years. The set of values for the school should define the parameters for behaviours in the school between staff and students and between staff themselves.

Industrial Relations

13.1 Prior to the safeguarding incident in October 2015, the panel noted that there was limited involvement of trade union representatives in the preceding issues. We were advised that a number of individual staff had sought their trade union's assistance and advice on personal grievances.

13.2 The trade union representatives within the school were involved in the meeting which agreed to submit the letter dated 21 October 2015 (see paragraph 11.1) in support of the staff members involved in the incident. The trade unions did not organise the staff protest on 23 October 2015. From the submissions made it is clear that the reaction to the Board of Governors' statement made at the staff meeting on 2 November 2015 was the catalyst for direct and intense trade union engagement including the senior officials of all the trade unions - this latter is a measure of the seriousness of the situation.

13.3 Submissions to the panel confirmed that at this time INTO trade union, which represents more than half the teachers, escalated industrial action in all schools as part of a wider dispute against education budget cuts. The combination of this 'work to rule' action, along with the heightened concerns of De La Salle staff following the incidents, and the reported spike in teacher sick leave absences, did impact on the day to day operation of the school. As an example, as noted later in this report, the panel heard from students that all after school sports activities were curtailed.

13.4 Submissions to the panel indicate that industrial relations within the school continued to deteriorate. By March 2016 the delay in implementing the agreed Strategic Plan for Renewal process was formally challenged by INTO who decided to ballot its members employed in De La Salle College to take targeted industrial action within the college. INTO members subsequently voted to take industrial action by way of non-co-operation and non-engagement with the school Principal. The action was officially authorised to commence on 25 April 2016.

13.5 This period of deterioration in industrial relations was played out in the full glare of frequent media and press coverage of events in the school along with continuing protests by parents concerned about the impact of a high level of teacher absences on their

children's education. On 7 April 2016 the Principal issued statements to the media which had further negative impact on relationships. By 23 April 2016 there were two Associate Principals working in the school.

13.6 It is deeply regrettable that the school fell to this level. As recorded elsewhere in this report the panel considers that there should have been much earlier interventions by CCMS. Media coverage has tended to present the situation in the school as an industrial relations dispute. That is not the panel's view. As noted above, one trade union had authorised its members in the school to take industrial action of non co-operation against the Principal; although that form of industrial action was highly unusual and open to potential challenge, it formed only one part of the overall circumstances in De La Salle College. The conduct of industrial relations for the wider maintained schools sector involves the joint engagement of the employing authority (CCMS and Board of Governors) with the recognised trade unions and we saw no evidence that working relationships at those higher levels were problematic.

13.7 Nor is it our finding that the circumstances in the school are solely attributable to the Principal. However, the submissions to the panel indicated that within the school the conduct of day to day industrial relations between school management and the school trade union representatives was poor. The panel's clear view is that measures are required to rebuild positive engagement, trust and confidence between school management and the school trade union representatives. The panel is therefore recommending that an internal school Joint Consultative Committee is established immediately to develop positive and constructive engagement on day to day industrial relations issues. The Board of Governors, school management and the trade unions should consult on setting up this joint forum and the matters appropriate for discussion at this level; the panel considers that business should include information sharing on matters under consideration by the Board of Governors. We recommend that this forum should initially meet on at least a monthly basis and that membership should comprise the Principal, Vice-Principals and all school representatives appointed by their respective trade unions. For the record the panel's proposal for this joint forum at school level is not intended in any way to change the role of the established Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) or the decision making responsibilities of the Principal and Board of Governors.

13.8 The panel's recommendation that an experienced Human Resources specialist be allocated to the school on a full-time basis for the next school year 2016/17 will also assist in developing good industrial relations processes and practices to the school. The duties of the post will include provision of support for the effective operation of the Joint Consultative Committee.

Recommendations

18.(A) The Board of Governors, school management and the trade unions should establish immediately a school based Joint Consultative Committee to include the Principal, Vice-Principals and all school representatives appointed by their respective trade unions. The parties should consult on the range of matters appropriate for discussion at the Joint Consultative Committee meetings and this should include information sharing on matters under consideration by the Board of Governors. It is further recommended that the Joint Consultative Committee should initially meet on at least a monthly basis.

19.(A) Linked with recommendations 4 and 14, and to meet the exceptional circumstances in De La Salle, the employing authorities (CCMS and EA), should facilitate the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school on a full-time basis for the next school year 2016/17.

Communications

14.1 Many of the submissions to the panel raised strong concerns about the lack of open and transparent communications within the school community at several levels – between the Board of Governors, school leaders and staff, between the school and students, between the school and parents. The lack of clear and open communications leads to the diminution of trust and respect. It also generates a culture of rumour and misinformation and information being transmitted inappropriately.

14.2 The panel itself experienced one example of a communication problem. Representatives of the Student Council told the panel - we believe entirely in good faith - that the school had applied to CCEA for a general special consideration for all candidates taking CCEA examinations to take account of the circumstances in the school; and further that this application was rejected by CCEA but the school was appealing. The panel verified directly with CCEA the fact that the school sought only an extension to the submission date for marks for coursework and samples of coursework for two subjects which CCEA granted. Furthermore the school had informed CCEA that there was no requirement 'for any other subject to be accorded special consideration'. In the panel's view this information should have been made available to all students involved in CCEA examinations.

14.3 The school needs to have in place an overarching communication plan, setting out how it will communicate with pupils, parents and teachers and outside bodies. The best examples of communication policies include principles, responsibilities, methods

of communication and a link with other key communication situations, for example in the event of a critical incident. In the modern world a school must engage with all stakeholders on a regular and consistent basis. In the world of technology and social media this is even more important. Lack of control in messaging and in the methods for doing so opens the way for inconsistent communication and for miscommunication. The panel considers that the development of a School Communications Plan for all stakeholders, inside and beyond, is a crucial tool in assisting De La Salle College to achieve the transformation that is required.

Recommendation

20.(A) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that the school develops a detailed Communications Plan setting out the tools and methodologies by which it communicates with students, parents and staff and outside bodies/stakeholders. This Plan should set in place a framework for regular communications with all relevant individuals and groups starting as soon as possible. (see also recommendation 31 below)

Staff Structures and Relationships

15.1 De La Salle is a large school employing 73 teachers, 41 Classroom Assistants and 49 ancillary staff. A school of this size requires a strong and well understood job/role structure for effective day to day management of the people resources at its disposal. In the submissions to the panel a wide range of issues and concerns were raised for our consideration. These included that:

- the allocation of roles and responsibilities was inequitable leading to the current structure operating to some people's interest more than others;
- a history of disputes over the selection of individuals for particular posts;
- a lack of transparency in the internal promotion opportunities and inequalities in the opportunities for staff development;
- a lack of a clear line management responsibility for classroom assistants who felt they were not managed in a consistent way; and
- the absence of transparency, control, or review mechanisms on the deployment of 'responsibility points' to assist with staff taking on additional roles or responsibilities.

In the time available for this investigation it was not possible for the panel to verify these concerns in detail. However, we consider these are matters that the school Board of Governors must critically examine and rectify where necessary.

15.2 The panel was also surprised to be informed that some critical internal college operational processes, such as timetabling and temporary staff cover, were not under control at Vice-Principal level. For example we were advised that the organisation of temporary cover was handled by the school's PE department and responsibility for timetabling was delegated below Vice-Principal level. There may have been historical reasons for this situation but the panel considers that seminal processes in running an effective and efficient school need to be centralised and made part of significant decision making for the school.

15.3 Again it was not feasible for the panel to embark on an investigation of these matters. We found it difficult to understand the rationale for the complex structure of posts and the wide allocation of responsibilities within the school's line management arrangements. The panel considers that the current structure lacks the necessary clear lines of responsibility and accountability to enable the school to recover from its current situation. The panel considers that the current arrangements do need to be critically reviewed. This review and the review of matters raised in paragraph 15.1 above must be done in full consultation with the trade unions. The panel recommends accordingly.

15.4 The panel was disturbed that so many submissions to us raised the issues of bullying and intimidating behaviour within the school. These were not confined to any one section or level. Individual staff described a culture of fear. During our investigation the results of the CareCall Staff Wellbeing survey were reported and the survey's findings confirmed the poor state of working relationships with very low morale and a lack of trust across the school.

15.5 Again, the panel was not in a position to investigate specific complaints of bullying or intimidating behaviour and we understand some complaints may be subject to employment procedures. The matter was raised so many times with us that it cannot be ignored and it is difficult to see how a situation such as this could possibly foster a culture which develops the skills of younger members of staff, shares good practice, encourages professional challenge, and invites participation in the day to day running of the school by all staff.

15.6 In any work environment there has to be zero tolerance of any form of bullying or intimidating behaviour. A school must set the very highest standards in this regard. The panel therefore makes a strong recommendation that the school management consults

with the trade unions on reissuing anti-bullying and harassment policies to all staff; the procedures for individual staff to raise complaints of any such unacceptable behaviours should be clearly defined and with measures in place to provide support.

Recommendations

21.(A) The panel recommends that CCMS, EA, Board of Governors and school management, in consultation with staff and trade unions, undertake a thorough review of the existing staffing structure in the school to ensure it is fit for purpose, transparent and equitable. There should be clarity and openness about all job descriptions, line management duties and the allocation of responsibility points, in order to avoid mistrust and perceptions of unfairness which currently exist.

22.(A) In particular the panel recommends that these consultations should include:

- responsibilities for the day to day control of school rotas, temporary cover, substitute teachers etc which should be the overall responsibility of a Vice-Principal;
- a review of the management of the school curriculum and in particular the arrangements for pupil's selection of courses to ensure compliance with the EF; and
- clarity on the day to day management of all non-teaching staff which should fall within the overall responsibility of a Vice-Principal.

23.(B) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that the school's vision and culture includes developing the skills of younger members of staff, the sharing of good practice, encouraging professional challenge, planning and participation in the day to day running of the school by all staff.

24.(B) The Board of Governors and staff should implement a systematic programme of professional development for all staff.

25.(A) The Board of Governors and school management, following consultation with the trade unions, should ensure that the school's anti-bullying and harassment policies are published and available to all staff. These policies should make clear that in the future any incidences of 'bullying, harassment or

intimidation' should be immediately reported through the appropriate channels and thoroughly investigated.

Impact on Students

16.1 In the 2011 School Inspection Report De La Salle College achieved an overall finding of 'very good'. For some areas inspected the school's performance was evaluated as 'outstanding', notably for the 'quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils'. However, at the panel's meetings with the students, members of the Student Council and the Concerned Parents Committee, their submissions were that the school's performance had slipped markedly and the recent situation had a detrimental impact on the educational entitlement of the young people in De La Salle.

16.2 While students reported that many teachers have tried throughout to maintain a professional approach to their teaching and responsibility to their students, the evidence pointed to the incidents and conflicts quite severely affecting the core purpose of the college and its pupils. For example, we heard that normal classes were frequently disrupted because of the levels of teacher absence; inadequate provision made in terms of substitute teachers and the setting of appropriate course work. The panel was not in a position to investigate these complaints in detail but the data obtained by the panel indicted high levels of teacher absence; this is bound to impact on the efficient running of the school and the quality of teaching and learning experienced by some pupils.

16.3 Students and parents also complained that sporting and musical activities, for which the school has a good reputation, have also been curtailed without any clear explanation being provided. It was clear to the panel that these young people were very worried about their future educational outcomes and told the panel that they no longer felt 'a sense of pride in their school'. Another information gap was that students were left unclear about the routes they should take in the college to air their concerns and/or obtain information and guidance.

16.4 The panel valued greatly the contributions of students to our investigation. The students that we met were a credit to the school. They articulated their concerns and views clearly to us. This was important as almost all other submissions to the panel concentrated almost entirely on the tensions and confrontational relationships between the Principal, senior leaders, Governors and staff and not the negative impact of all the disputes on the students. The panel felt that it is totally unacceptable that relationship breakdowns within a school at governance and teacher levels should impact on students.

Recommendations

26.(A) It is totally unacceptable for any breakdown in working relationships within the governance, management and staff to have impacted adversely on the students in De La Salle. CCMS, the Board of Governors, school management, staff, parents and pupils must immediately re-establish a clear vision and ethos for the school which is uncompromisingly 'child-centred' and puts the education of the students firmly at its heart.

27.(A) As a matter of urgency, the precise roles and responsibilities of subject teachers, Heads of Department, Year Heads and Key Stage Leaders should be reviewed, publicised and communicated to students and parents. The information published should aim to ensure that in the event of teacher absences, students do not experience major problems with the provision of substitute staff, continuity of the teaching programmes, the monitoring of homework and coursework plus clarity on who students should approach for guidance.

Concerns of Parents / the Wider Community

17.1 The panel received a comprehensive presentation of concerns from the 'Concerned Parents Committee'. They commented specifically on a lack of homework, teachers not turning up to teach classes, absenteeism amongst staff and lack of PE provision. Many said they had tried in vain to complain and had repeatedly contacted the school but messages had seldom been followed up by the Principal, Heads of Year, Form Tutors or Key Stage Co-ordinators or school office staff. This had eventually led to the creation of a Facebook page in order to highlight their frustrations to the community.

17.2 Parents commented that they had made a 'positive choice' to enrol their children into De La Salle because of its 'good academic reputation and caring attitude towards the boys' who attended. Several were ex-pupils and praised the quality of provision they received. All said that they were appalled at the recent events and the impact these matters had on the education of their children. Several said "***they wished the school could get back to what it once was***".

17.3 The panel had received copies of postings on the Concerned Parents Committee Facebook page with strong concerns raised that the content of some postings were damaging to the school's reputation and standing in the community. There were also concerns that information, of a confidential nature, had been provided for the Facebook from within the school. The Committee representatives felt that, in the absence of

communications from the school, their Committee felt that it had a responsibility to share information received and that information came from a number of sources.

17.4 Given the timescale for this investigation, it was impractical for the panel to instigate a 'call for evidence' from all parents to assess a wider parental view of the situation in De La Salle. We were advised that there was a De La Salle Parent Teacher Association in the past. The Group did express a willingness to consider re-establishing a formal Parent Teacher Association and the panel recommends accordingly.

Recommendations

28.(A) As a matter of urgency the Board of Governors and school management must create clear channels of communication with the parents and wider community. This must respond to all contacts from parents within an agreed timeframe and effectively in order to avoid misinformation or misunderstandings.

29.(B) In recognition that some parents felt 'no account was taken of their views', the Board of Governors and school management, should review, in collaboration with parents, the effectiveness of parent/school interactions and the formation of a Parents' Association.

30.(B) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that all persons with access to confidential school material are aware that any unauthorised disclosure is wholly unacceptable and that any future 'leakage' of such information into the public domain would be fully investigated by the relevant authorities and, where necessary, action taken against offenders.

31.(A) The panel acknowledges that there can be some justification for highlighting legitimate concerns through the press or social media, but on the other hand negative comments, however well meaning, can have a detrimental effect on the image of the college both in the wider community and for those pupils, parents and teachers associated with it. The panel recommends that the Board of Governors and staff design and implement a positive communications campaign for the school in order to promote a more positive image of De La Salle.

Wider Compliance Issues

18.1 Submissions to the panel raised concerns that the school was not in compliance across a range of processes with potential for serious repercussions. The panel noted

that CCEA intervened because of concerns that the school was not in compliance with the General Conditions of Recognition as providers of examinations. CCEA was continuing to consider matters. Questions were also raised as to whether or not the school is fulfilling its obligations in relation to the Entitlement Framework.

18.2 As stated earlier many submissions cited that De La Salle College did not have an up to date School Development Plan. We understand that the staff meeting held on 2 November 2015 (addressed by the Board of Governors following the safeguarding incident) was scheduled to enable staff to make presentations and discuss the School Development Plan. The 2011 School Inspection Report recorded that there was a School Development Plan at that date. As the matter was raised with us we offer these comments.

18.3 Firstly, having in place a current School Development Plan is a clear statutory requirement - the Board of Governors of a school must therefore ensure that this statutory obligation is met at all times. If De La Salle is at risk of being in breach of this requirement then the Board of Governors and school leaders must take necessary actions urgently. Secondly, it was not clear to the panel that the relevant authorities, CCMS and EA had robust processes in place to monitor compliance with this statutory requirement and to take action where necessary. We make a recommendation covering both points.

18.4 The importance of the School Development Plan cannot be understated – a good Plan steers performance in a school and should be based on a strong evidence base setting out clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the actions to be taken to deal with both. The panel noted that there was limited evidence of the following:

- planning, both strategic and operational, being carried out on a regular and consistent basis;
- routine and regular collection and analysis of data tracking performance at school, departmental and course levels, benchmarking and continuous improvement across the school;
- the use of expert advice and support in tackling a number of issues including HR, audit, teaching and learning and student success; and
- any agreed plan for improvement for the college with attendant responsibility and accountability lines.

18.5 In the panel's view however, the absence of a strong vision for the school going forward, tends to open the way for unfocussed and disconnected actions. In paragraph 12.6 above the panel identified that a strong data platform which tracks performance at all levels is essential.

Recommendations

32.(A) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that there are processes in place to ensure the school's compliance on issues including those related to audit, financial processes, HR practice, curriculum and data management. Processes for school effectiveness and efficiency must be defined and systems put in place for their control and management. Compliance must also be undertaken in a robust and rigorous way setting in place full accountability processes.

33.(A) A School Development Plan must be developed as a matter of urgency; while this can be part of the overall Strategic Plan for Renewal process it must receive high priority. In the longer term processes for its annual review and update must be put in place.

34.(B) CCMS and EA should review urgently their processes for monitoring compliance with the statutory requirement on schools to have in place a School Development Plan and/or in meeting obligations such as the EF; and develop protocols for action to ensure compliance.

35.(B) CCMS and EA should consider issuing appropriate guidance to staff on the different roles and responsibilities of CCMS and the EA within the maintained sector.

Moving Forward

19.1 The panel was tasked to investigate 'all the factors and circumstances' in De La Salle College and to make recommendations. To meet the short time scale for this task, and the imperative that the panel's recommendations should be available for the start of the 2016/17 school year, we have sought to focus on the incidents and issues that, in this panel's view, contributed significantly to the current circumstances of this school. As reflected in our analysis and recommendations above, we could not understate the seriousness of those circumstances. We have already stated there was no single cause or factor; as a result of a sequence of changes in school leadership

posts, school governance and a number of critical incidents there was a progressive deterioration in the working relationships.

19.2 Given our terms of reference, the investigation naturally focused on the difficulties and problems that existed in the college. The panel is in no doubt that teachers have clearly tried throughout to maintain a professional approach to their teaching and responsibility towards their students. We heard strong testimonies to the commitment of teachers to pupils and the community and the reciprocal commitment of the community to the college. The panel heard sufficient evidence to be satisfied that the exceptional circumstances that currently face De La Salle College can be overcome, but equally, to achieve this goal successfully will require exceptional measures. The panel recommends that the following additional actions are required.

Skill Set and Stability for School Leadership

20.1 It is essential that stability in the school leadership posts is restored and maintained throughout the 2016/17 school year. While acknowledging the employing authority's responsibilities under employment law, the panel considers that the exceptional circumstances require all mechanisms to be explored to ensure there are school leaders in place with the required experience and skills to achieve the full support and commitment of all staff, parents and the community; the National Standards for Head Teachers (Northern Ireland Edition) provides full details of the requisite person skills for successful school leadership.

Recommendation

36.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors must ensure that stability in the school leadership posts is restored urgently for the next school year 2016/17 whilst ensuring the availability of the requisite personal skills in full compliance with the National Standards for School Leadership.

ETI Inspection

21.1 It is beyond the scope of this panel's investigation to comment on the quality of learning and teaching, use of data and the range of other normal procedures and practices found in any successful school. It is the case that a number of submissions advocated that there were shortcomings on a range of aspects including the quality of teaching and learning, standards and achievement, curriculum planning and administration. These are all matters that would normally be addressed by a school inspection.

21.2 The panel would recommend that a full inspection would be appropriate. The panel considers that an inspection would assist Governors and the wider school community in forming the necessary remedial targets, policies and strategies to bring the school to a proper functioning establishment. However the panel would also respectfully advise ETI that the commencement of any inspection should take into account the recommendations in this report - the panel's concern is that progress in implementing the urgent 'A' category recommendations should not be adversely impacted by the timing of the start of the inspection.

Recommendation

37.(A) The panel recommends that ETI should schedule a full inspection in De La Salle as soon as practicable but taking into account the need to make initial progress on the implementation of other actions as recommended in this report. This inspection should provide a clear understanding of the operational capacity of the school and give a practical baseline for the school leadership within the next school year as well as assisting Governors and the wider college community in forming the necessary remedial targets, policies and strategies to bring the school back to a proper functioning establishment.

Board of Governors: Review of Skill Set

22.1 To assist in moving forward the panel suggests that there may be value in reviewing the range of skills and experience currently represented on the Board of Governors and consider if additional Governors should be appointed to cover any identified gaps.

Recommendation

38.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should review the skills and experiences of the current Governors and consider appointing additional Governors to meet any identified gaps in skills and experience.

Early Retirement Package

23.1 The panel was advised that a number of teachers at the school had submitted applications under the 'transfer redundancy' processes but were not successful. We heard that teachers were so affected by the circumstances in the school that some were considering resigning their posts and one teacher had done so. To repeat, the school's circumstances are exceptional. For example, there is every possibility that the outcome of recommendations 23 and 24 (review of management structure etc) could lead to

proposals for changes in posts, roles and responsibilities. The availability of adequate funding and processes to assist necessary restructuring is important to success.

Recommendation

39.(A) To assist the process of renewal at De La Salle, CCMS and EA should urgently consider the scope under current schemes such as VES, Investing in the Workforce, and/or other sources, to fund measures to support necessary staff structure changes and opportunities for early retirement for teachers who wish to be considered for this option.

Warning Signs Checklist / Early Intervention

24.1 Finally, as reflected by this report the issues and difficulties in the De La Salle College were evident well before the deterioration to the current circumstances. The panel accepts that our analysis of the position has the benefit of hindsight. Nevertheless, from the submissions received, it is clear that CCMS and the EA, as the responsible authorities were aware of, and/or, indeed were intervening in issues as they occurred. The panel considers that there should have been an earlier focused intervention by CCMS having regard to factors such as high turnover or prolonged acting appointments of college leadership, sudden fall in examinations success, high rates of teacher absenteeism, complaints from parents etc. We recommend that CCMS and EA should establish a 'Warning Signs' checklist to ensure early intervention always takes place and to share this information with ETI.

Recommendation

40.(B) CCMS and EA should put in place a 'Warning Signs' checklist citing matters such as a high turnover of leadership, sudden fall in examinations success, high rates of teacher absenteeism, complaints from parents etc so that early intervention by the relevant authorities would automatically take place in those schools which are facing challenges and are not meeting the educational entitlement all students should expect. CCMS and EA should share this information with ETI.

August 2016

Proposed Summary of Recommendations

'A' for immediate implementation in respect of De La Salle College

'B' for the appropriate authorities to implement as soon as practicable

School Principal Changes – Acting Appointments 2012-2014

- 1.(B) CCMS and EA should review their policies and protocols for monitoring and supporting the effective management of schools where there are prolonged acting appointments to Principal and Vice-Principal posts.

Internal Audit Reports

- 2.(B) CCMS and EA should review the information published on the role and responsibilities of Boards of Governors to ensure that their responsibility for the school's financial management and budget is prominently and clearly stated in all relevant literature.
- 3.(B) CCMS and EA should develop and make available to Boards of Governors good practice protocols for the handling of adverse Internal Audit reports including the timely dissemination of appropriate information to school staff and to parents through the school's annual report.

Appointment of Principal

- 4.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should ensure that there are stable school leadership arrangements in place throughout the 2016/17 school year with a robust support programme put in place for the Principal in post in De La Salle. This support should include the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school for the next school year 2016/17.
- 5.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that there is a formal and structured induction programme for all new Principals and Vice-Principals which includes the provision of mentoring/coaching and access to expert advice on a range of issues.
- 6.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that there are mechanisms and resources in place to support newly appointed Principals and particularly where the preceding school leadership posts had been covered by acting appointments for prolonged periods.

7.(B) CCMS and EA should ensure that the Board of Governors fulfil their duties to:

- review the performance of the Principal annually in meeting the school's policy and objectives, as determined by the Board of Governors; and
- ensure that the professional development and performance of all teachers is reviewed annually in accordance with the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Scheme.

Reconstitutions of Board of Governors

8.(A) CCMS should acknowledge the contribution of members of the former Board of Governors who had contributed significant time and effort to address issues in De La Salle following the 2013 Audit Reports.

9.(B) CCMS should review its policies and processes when initiating a reconstitution of a school's Board of Governors to ensure that the school's current Governors are fully informed of the reasons for the reconstitution and how the process will be undertaken.

10.(B) To ensure that the fundamental and respective roles of the Board of Governors and school leaders are clearly understood by all, CCMS/EA should develop an appropriate module to ensure that all reconstituted Boards of Governors receive training alongside the principal and senior leaders, before beginning their tenure of office and at regular intervals throughout their term of office. This would clarify for all parties their central purpose, roles and responsibilities and their operational boundaries.

11.(B) As part of the induction programme it should also be standard practice that reconstituted Boards of Governors meet with all staff at an early date and engage on a regular basis with staff.

Safeguarding Incident and Subsequent Action

12.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should ensure that the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and procedures are fully updated and available to all school staff. The Board of Governors should also ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff receive appropriate training in the policy on a regular basis.

- 13.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should develop a 'Critical Incident' strategy to address any such incidents that may arise. This strategy should include details of responsible personnel for actions and protocols on communications to the school community. Critical Incident contact information should be displayed appropriately within the school.
- 14.(B) CCMS and EA should review current protocols and practices on arrangements for the provision of Human Resource advice and support to maintained schools on any incidents and/or issues that affect both teaching and non-teaching staff and to consider scope to agree a single source of advice to the school management where, in particular cases, this may be necessary.

Strategic Plan for Renewal Process

- 15.(A) The Strategic Plan for Renewal process must be reinvigorated and continued in line with best practice in project management and resourced appropriately. In particular CCMS, the Board of Governors and the trade unions should consult to review a streamlining of the Group structure and to prioritise Action Plan areas, whilst taking into account all the recommendations in this report. As a first priority the SPR process should contribute to developing the School Development Plan. (see also recommendation 33)
- 16.(A) The panel recommends that a strong management information platform, to assist with decision making, is required to be developed as part of the Strategic Plan for Renewal.
- 17.(B) The panel recommends that a set of values/behaviours defining the De La Salle way is included in the Strategic Plan for Renewal and as part of this process to develop a meaningful vision for at least the next 5 years. The set of values for the school should define the parameters for behaviours in the school between staff and students and between staff themselves.

Industrial Relations

- 18.(A) The Board of Governors, school management and the trade unions should establish immediately a school based Joint Consultative Committee to include the Principal, Vice-Principals and all school representatives appointed by their respective trade unions. The parties should consult on the range of matters appropriate for discussion at the Joint Consultative Committee meetings and this should include information sharing on matters under consideration by the Board

of Governors. It is further recommended that the Joint Consultative Committee should initially meet on at least a monthly basis.

19.(A) Linked with recommendations 4 and 14, and to meet the exceptional circumstances in De La Salle, the employing authorities (CCMS and EA), should facilitate the allocation of an experienced Human Resources specialist to the school on a full-time basis for the next school year 2016/17.

Communications

20.(A) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that the school develops a detailed Communications Plan setting out the tools and methodologies by which it communicates with students, parents and staff and outside bodies/stakeholders. This Plan should set in place a framework for regular communications with all relevant individuals and groups starting as soon as possible. (see also recommendation 31 below)

Staff Structures and Relationships

21.(A) The panel recommends that CCMS, EA, Board of Governors and school management, in consultation with staff and trade unions, undertake a thorough review of the existing staffing structure in the school to ensure it is fit for purpose, transparent and equitable. There should be clarity and openness about all job descriptions, line management duties and the allocation of responsibility points, in order to avoid mistrust and perceptions of unfairness which currently exist.

22.(A) In particular the panel recommends that these consultations should include:

- responsibilities for the day to day control of school rotas, temporary cover, substitute teachers etc, which should be the overall responsibility of a Vice-Principal;
- a review of the management of the school curriculum and in particular the arrangements for pupil's selection of courses to ensure compliance with the EF; and
- clarity on the day to day management of all non-teaching staff which should fall within the overall responsibility of a Vice-Principal.

- 23.(B) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that the school's vision and culture includes developing the skills of younger members of staff, the sharing of good practice, encouraging professional challenge, planning and participation in the day to day running of the school by all staff.
- 24.(B) The Board of Governors and staff should implement a systematic programme of professional development for all staff.
- 25.(A) The Board of Governors and school management, following consultation with the trade unions, should ensure that the school's anti-bullying and harassment policies are published and available to all staff. These policies should make clear that in the future any incidences of 'bullying, harassment or intimidation' should be immediately reported through the appropriate channels and thoroughly investigated.

Impact on Students

- 26.(A) It is totally unacceptable for any breakdown in working relationships within the governance, management and staff to have impacted adversely on the students in De La Salle. CCMS, the Board of Governors, school management, staff, parents and pupils must immediately re-establish a clear vision and ethos for the school which is uncompromisingly 'child-centred' and puts the education of the students firmly at its heart.
- 27.(A) As a matter of urgency, the precise roles and responsibilities of subject teachers, Heads of Department, Year Heads and Key Stage Leaders should be reviewed, publicised and communicated to students and parents. The information published should aim to ensure that in the event of teacher absences, students do not experience major problems with the provision of substitute staff, continuity of the teaching programmes, the monitoring of homework and coursework plus clarity on who students should approach for guidance.

Concerns of Parents / the Wider Community

- 28.(A) As a matter of urgency the Board of Governors and school management must create clear channels of communication with the parents and wider community. This must respond to all contacts from parents within an agreed timeframe and effectively in order to avoid misinformation or misunderstandings.

- 29.(B) In recognition that some parents felt ‘no account was taken of their views’, the Board of Governors and school management, should review, in collaboration with parents, the effectiveness of all parent/school interactions and the formation of a Parents’ Association.
- 30.(B) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that all persons with access to confidential school material are aware that any unauthorised disclosure is wholly unacceptable and that any future ‘leakage’ of such information into the public domain would be fully investigated by the relevant authorities and, where necessary, action taken against offenders.
- 31.(A) The panel acknowledges that there can be some justification for highlighting legitimate concerns through the press or social media, but on the other hand negative comment, however well meaning, can have a detrimental effect on the image of the college both in the wider community and for the pupils, parents and teachers associated with it. The Panel recommends that the Board of Governors and staff design and implement a positive communications campaign for the school in order to promote a more positive image of De La Salle.

Wider Compliance Issues

- 32.(A) The Board of Governors and school management should ensure that there are processes in place to ensure the school’s compliance on issues including those related to audit, financial processes, HR practice, curriculum and data management. Processes for school effectiveness and efficiency must be defined and systems put in place for their control and management. Compliance must also be undertaken in a robust and rigorous way setting in place full accountability processes.
- 33.(A) A School Development Plan must be developed as a matter of urgency; while this can be part of the overall Strategic Plan for Renewal process it must receive high priority. In the longer term processes for its annual review and update must be put in place.
- 34.(B) CCMS and EA should review urgently their processes for monitoring compliance with the statutory requirement on schools to have in place a School Development Plan and/or in meeting obligations such as the EF and develop protocols for action to ensure compliance.

35.(B) CCMS and EA should consider issuing appropriate guidance to staff on the different roles and responsibilities of CCMS and the EA within the maintained sector.

Moving Forward

Skill Set and Stability for School Leadership

36.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors must ensure that stability in the school leadership posts is restored urgently for the next school year 2016/17 whilst ensuring the availability of the requisite personal skills in full compliance with the National Standards for School Leadership.

ETI Inspection

37.(A) The panel recommends that ETI should schedule a full inspection in De La Salle as soon as practicable but taking into account the need to make initial progress on the implementation of other actions as recommended in this report. This inspection should provide a clear understanding of the operational capacity of the school and give a practical baseline for the school leadership within the next school year as well as assisting Governors and the wider school community in forming the necessary remedial targets, policies and strategies to bring the school back to a proper functioning establishment.

Board of Governors: Review Skill Set

38.(A) CCMS and the Board of Governors should review the skills and experiences of the current Governors and consider appointing additional Governors to meet any identified gaps in skills and experience.

Early Retirement Package

39.(A) To assist the process of renewal at De La Salle, CCMS and EA should urgently consider the scope under current schemes such as VES, Investing in the Workforce, and/or other sources, to fund measures to support necessary staff structure changes and opportunities for early retirement for teachers who wish to be considered for this option.

Warning Signs Checklist / Early Intervention

40.(B) CCMS and EA should put in place a 'Warning Signs' checklist citing matters such as a high turnover of leadership, sudden fall in examinations success, high rates of teacher absenteeism, complaints from parents etc so that early intervention by the relevant authorities would automatically take place in those schools which are facing challenges and are not meeting the educational entitlement all students should expect. CCMS and EA should share this information with ETI.

Appendix 1

Record of panel meetings

Date of meeting	No of meetings	Participant (s)
25 May 2016	5	Chair Board of Governors, Associate Principals, CCMS Associate, Vice-Principals
3 June 2016	4	CCMS, NASUWT, Principal, ATL
8 June 2016	2	UNISON, School Governor
10 June 2016	2	Principal, West Belfast MP
15 June 2016	2	NIPSA, INTO
21 June 2016	3	NAHT, Pupils, SLT
5 July 2016	4	CCEA, Former School Governors, CCMS, Concerned Parents Committee
14 July 2016	1	INTO School Local Representative
21 July 2016	4	NASUWT school trade union representative, members of the Student Council, ETI, EA
22 July 2016	1	BoG members who were members of both the former & current Board

Record of submissions received

Date Received	
30 May 2016	Submission from Associate Principal
3 June 2016	Submission from Principal
15 June 2016	Joint submission from Associate Principal & CCMS Associate Carecall – confidential staff wellbeing review report (14 June 2016) Submission from INTO
28 June 2016	Submission from a Primary Principal
14 July 2016	Submission from INTO School Union Reps.
20 July 2016	Submission from UTU
20 July 2016	Submission from BoG member
22 July 2016	Submission from BoG member
	Plus 46 Responses to Questionnaires from school staff

**Report to the Department of Education of the
independent panel appointed to investigate the circumstances
in De La Salle College, Belfast**

August 2016