

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

**Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT**

**Coláiste Cholmáin
Claremorris, Co Mayo
Roll number: 64610N**

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REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

Subject Inspection report

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Cholmáin, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of provision in Guidance and makes recommendations for the further development of Guidance in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector held discussions with the principal and guidance counsellor in the school, viewed guidance facilities, visited a classroom, interacted with students, sat in on a meeting of the planning team and reviewed Guidance planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and guidance counsellor.

Subject Provision and Whole School Support

Coláiste Cholmáin is a single sex boys' school and is the only such school in the region. Students come from a wide catchment area and the school has approximately twelve feeder schools. The students come from mixed social backgrounds and the school population includes all ability levels. There are over thirty students with special educational needs attending the school. There are over twenty international students who have come mainly from eastern European countries and there are two students from the Traveller community. All of these students are integrating well into the school and are welcomed by the school community. The school offers a broad curriculum which can cater for the diverse range of interests and abilities of its students. The range of subjects offered is commended.

A high percentage of the students aim to go to third level education. Eighty five percent of the current sixth year has applied for third level places through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Of the remaining students, many intend taking up an apprenticeship, mainly in the building and construction area. The school introduced Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in recent years and attributes an increase in its retention rates to this introduction. There is a pastoral care structure in the school and the guidance counsellor is the co-ordinator of the care team which includes the year heads, the

special needs co-ordinator and the school chaplain. There is a strong commitment to the holistic development and care of each student in the school and this was evidenced by the staff-student interactions witnessed and by the posters and two and three dimensional displays throughout the school. The school has a crisis response/critical incident policy and the guidance counsellor has been involved in its development.

The school receives 13 ex quota hours per week from the Department for Guidance. Currently only 11 hours are provided and it is recommended that the remainder of the hours be allocated as a matter of priority. The guidance counsellor has taken up the position this year after the retirement of the previous incumbent.

There are four timetabled classes for Guidance, one with each of the Transition Year (TY) class and one each with Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Year 1 and Year 2. The guidance counsellor works closely with the Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) co-ordinator and has taught SPHE. This co-operation is commended, as it ensures that where there is an overlap between aspects of the SPHE and Guidance programmes that they are delivered in a co-ordinated manner. By delivering the linked aspects of the Guidance and SPHE curricula, the guidance counsellor can meet junior cycle students in a class context and start the process of assisting them in developing the skills required to make personal, educational and career choices later in their lives. It also provides an opportunity for the guidance counsellor to identify early those students who may require individual counselling.

The Guidance office is located in the original priests' house which is linked to a newer building that forms the main part of the school. Although it is small, the office is well equipped, and is comfortable and quiet. There is no designated budget for Guidance, but funding is provided upon request for materials and guidance related activities. The school has excellent information communications technology (ICT) facilities and students have access to these for guidance purposes. There is a careers library and two display boards for guidance related notices, one in the main hall and the other outside the guidance counsellor's office.

The school has well established links with a number of outside agencies. Referrals are made when necessary through the principal to the Health Service Executive and to a local voluntary family support service, Cúram. The school also has links with the Youthreach Centre in Kiltimagh and with the National Educational Psychological Service psychologist for the area. Through the work experience programmes, links have been established with local businesses.

Students are referred to the guidance counsellor by year heads mainly but they can also self-refer or their parents can contact the guidance counsellor directly.

Planning and Preparation

The school has a Guidance policy and has started to develop a full plan. A planning team has been established which is co-ordinated by the guidance counsellor and at the time of the visit two planning meetings had been held. The current guidance counsellor was not involved in drafting the policy which is being reviewed as part of the work of the new planning team. The planning team agrees that there needs to be an input from all members of the staff into the new plan and a decision has been taken to send drafts of it to all staff members via e-mail for their information, responses and recommendations for improvement. This approach is commended. The guidance counsellor intends to involve parents more in the developing Guidance programme. At present parents have no formal role in Guidance but are very active in other areas of the school life and are good at attending meetings. It is recommended that in addition to parents students (through the Student Council) and other relevant members of the school community also be consulted throughout the planning process. It is also recommended that the planning team consult the template for Guidance available on the Department's website www.education.ie as well as the two documents *Planning the School Guidance Programme* published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance* published by the Inspectorate of the Department.

The guidance counsellor is involved in the enrolment night for incoming students and as co-ordinator of pastoral care is involved in the early identification of students with special educational needs and those with other difficulties.

All first year students are met individually to ensure that they are settling into secondary school life and a file is set up on each. Students are not required to make subject option choices until the end of first year when the guidance counsellor meets them in class groups to discuss issues around subject choice and to relate subjects to careers. In addition, each student is met again by the guidance counsellor to discuss his choices. This is commended as best practice as it enables students to make more informed choices based on their experience, aptitude and interest rather than on perception. It also ensures that students understand the implications of their choices in terms of further study and career options.

The parents of second year students are met to discuss subject choice and the levels at which their sons can take subjects for the Junior Certificate. Students then make their choice for Junior Certificate. This emphasis on making informed choices and involving parents in the process is commended. The school has a template for a change of subject or level of study during second year. The guidance counsellor explains the implications of changing subject and/or level of study and after this process, if a student decides to change either, then the template must be signed by the student, his parents, the relevant teacher or teachers and the principal. This procedure is commended.

An outside company comes to the school to provide a seminar on study skills for second years. The Student Council organises this event. The guidance counsellor recognises the particular issues that can arise in second year and plans to develop a broader guidance programme for this year. This would include working through SPHE in areas of personal and social development and working with class teachers to link subjects and the level at which the subjects are taken, to careers. The guidance counsellor also intends to take second years out of school for fun activities. This recognition of the particular needs of second year students is commended and it is recommended that this planned programme be implemented.

Third Year students have a further seminar on study skills. In this year, students decide which Leaving Certificate programme to take. The school offers Transition Year (TY) and the three Leaving Certificate programmes and hold a parents' night to provide them with information about each programme. Students are then met individually to discuss their preferred options.

The TY programme in the school is broad and reflects the principles which underlie this option. Students study all available senior cycle subjects on a modular basis. There is a focus on work experience and career investigation. Students carry out a project on their work experience. The Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) and interest tests are administered and the results discussed with the students in individual interviews. Students become familiar with the programme options for Leaving Certificate and choose the one they wish to take. They also choose their subject options at the end of the year. Guidance is timetabled for TY.

All fifth years other than those who opt for the LCA follow the LCVP programme in fifth year. This provides them with the opportunity to take the link modules which are designed to help students to develop a range of personal skills and to prepare them for adult life. The module *–Preparation for the World of Work* provides students with opportunities to learn about the world of work and to gain work experience. This module is an excellent guidance programme to complement the other guidance activities for senior cycle students. The guidance counsellor plans to borrow classes to undertake guidance activities with fifth years from February onwards. It is planned to introduce them to Qualifax, and to cover the CAO process. It is not planned to meet each student individually, but if a student is referred or wishes to discuss any issue with the guidance counsellor, time will be made available for this.

All sixth year students are met individually to discuss third level or further education options. A number of students apply to UK colleges and are assisted in completing the *Universities and Colleges Admissions Service* (UCAS) application. Students attend college open days, career events, a FÁS training centre and centres of further education. Speakers are invited into the school from colleges to provide information on courses offered by their respective institutions. The guidance counsellor plans to introduce a parents' night at which they will be provided with information and advice on how to help

their sons to prepare for the Leaving Certificate and life after school. It is recommended that this plan be implemented.

Past students of the school are welcome to make contact with the guidance counsellor but there is no formal mechanism for contact with former students.

The guidance counsellor attends the monthly branch meeting of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and will commence professional supervision in January 07. The school will facilitate this participation in continuous professional development and is commended for this.

Teaching and Learning

The guidance counsellor is timetabled for a Guidance class with LCA 2 each week and this class was visited. The work planned for the class was the administration of an interest test. The number in the class was low and this provided the opportunity for individual attention. The guidance counsellor explained the purpose of the test, outlined how it was to be completed and discussed each of the occupations listed. The students displayed interest in the activity and engaged meaningfully throughout. Some discussion was held with the students about their work experience and their career plans. Most expressed satisfaction with their chosen area of work and many indicated that they intend pursuing a career in the area, some through apprenticeship. The level of maturity of the students was impressive.

Assessment

The Drumcondra Reasoning Test is administered in first year. The results of this test are used to identify students who may require learning support. The school states that the results are not used for streaming purposes.

The Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) are administered in 3rd year to students proceeding directly to fifth year and otherwise are administered in TY. The results of these tests are discussed with students individually with a view to assisting them in making subject choices for the Leaving Certificate.

The Rothwell-Millar Interest Inventory is administered to senior cycle students.

TY students keep a diary and it is planned to introduce the Student Yearbook and Career Diary to all senior cycle students.

The guidance counsellor is setting up a new filing and record system as no records were given by the previous guidance counsellor. It is recommended that relevant records be transferred to the new guidance counsellor.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

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

- The school caters for a wide range of student backgrounds and ability and is successful in meeting the needs of all its students.
- The broad curriculum and senior cycle programmes offered by the school provide students with a wide range of options.
- The school provides for the holistic development of its students through a well structured pastoral care system.

- Guidance is being integrated with SPHE where overlap exists between the two areas.
- The guidance counsellor's input into the pastoral care team ensures that Guidance is integrated into the support services available to students.
- Guidance planning has commenced and a planning team has been established. The team intends to consult with all staff members throughout the drafting of the plan. It is recommended that parents, students (through the Student Council) and other relevant members of the school community also be consulted throughout the planning process. It is also recommended that the Department Guidance template and the documents already described be used as guides by the planning team.
- Students have access to ICT facilities for guidance purposes.

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

- All of the ex quota hours (currently 13) provided by the Department for Guidance, should be used for that purpose.
- There should be greater balance between the Guidance provision for junior and senior cycles. All students should have access to Guidance throughout junior cycle.
- Those aspects of guidance that can be delivered on a class basis should be timetabled. A modular approach might be considered where each class receives a module on guidance in each year, starting with first year. Links with SPHE in junior cycle would facilitate planning the modules for junior cycle.
- The procedures for individual counselling should be formalised with allocated times set aside for such appointments.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the guidance counsellor(s) and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.