



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

**Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT**

**Coláiste Chiaráin Leixlip Community School
Celbridge Road, Leixlip, Co. Kildare.
Roll number: 91371B**

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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 Chiaráin, Leixlip Community School, Leixlip, County Kildare. 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 visited classrooms, viewed Guidance facilities, interacted with students, held discussions with teachers and reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the guidance counsellors. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Subject Provision and Whole School Support

Leixlip Community School is a community school, serving boys and girls. Current enrolment is 568. It is envisaged that enrolment numbers will increase over the next few years due to the school's proximity to new housing developments in the locality and in the surrounding areas of Kildare. The school's building and grounds are well maintained and welcoming. The school's layout and design are very conducive to meeting the educational and social requirements of its learning community. A full range of programmes including Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) are offered. In the current year, TY is not available because of the small take-up of the programme last year, but every effort is being made to promote this programme with students and parents.

The guidance service is very well established in the school. The school prides itself on being a caring school and on providing students with a wide range of educational, vocational and personal opportunities and supports. The full-time ex-quota post for Guidance is augmented this year by an additional two hours. Two guidance counsellors share this allocation for Guidance of twenty four hours and make up the school's guidance team. This team, in conjunction with management and other staff, plan the delivery of the guidance programmes for all students. Guidance is available for students in both junior and senior cycles and is integrated with the curricula and programmes. A good combination of methodologies is used to provide guidance throughout the school. Timetabled classes, one-to-one interviews, occasional classes borrowed from other staff are some of the approaches employed. Students making important transitions into and from the school are targeted for particular support. Guidance is viewed as a very important resource for students and the guidance team's role is particularly valued by management. The school acknowledges that guidance integrates well with the other supports being provided and with the pastoral system. Counselling as well as guidance support is available from the guidance team when required to deal with students' personal and educational issues. Year heads, class tutors, subject teachers and the chaplain also provide on-going mentoring support and advice for students and refer students on to the guidance team for extra support when required.

The school has one dedicated office for Guidance. This room is shared by the guidance team. It is suitably located and facilitates full access for

students and their parents. Full Broad Band access is provided and all necessary equipment. In the corridors, notice boards displaying careers and college information are well maintained. The guidance office also houses the careers library, which students can access freely. Good information communication technology (ICT) is available throughout the school and students are actively encouraged to avail of this facility. Good referral contacts have been established with all appropriate external agencies and bodies. Internal communication channels with other staff, programme co-ordinators and management are very well developed and are reviewed on an on-going basis.

The school is currently considering the viability of creating a school care team to co-ordinate support provision for students. While good informal contacts are being maintained and strategies are planned and implemented by a wide range of staff, the creation of a formal care team would allow for the development of more structured and maintainable support systems for students. It is therefore recommended that full consideration be given by management to the establishment of such a team to include guidance personnel. A committee convened in 2005 developed a critical incident plan. The same committee, which includes Guidance is now meeting to up-date its contents.

Planning and Preparation

The school is engaging actively in subject and programme planning and this is commendable. Regular subject planning sessions are held as well as meetings with management to discuss guidance issues. The school is aware of the need to ensure that all students have access to appropriate guidance and a whole school guidance plan has been drafted. This plan gives due regard to the school's mission statement and has established clear objectives for the delivery of guidance throughout the school. It is very comprehensive, includes programmes for each year group and for all school programmes, and recognises the need to provide guidance in both junior and senior cycles. Planning is seen as a process and the plan is being further developed this year to encompass a wider range of supports for students. In addition, the team is also assessing new roles for guidance in a whole school context. Two particularly good features of guidance planning are the way that students' needs have been evaluated, and the good networking that has taken place with staff. It is therefore recommended that the guidance plan should be completed to indicate linkages with all school programmes and existing support structures. The plan should be circulated to staff, parents and students for consultation and then to the board of management.

The school junior cycle guidance programme begins when students are transferring from primary school. There is evidence of very good collaboration with feeder primary schools and between guidance, learning support and management to assist in the smooth transfer of students. An open evening is held for prospective parents of first years to keep them fully informed about all the school can offer to students and about the supports that are available to support learning. It is suggested however, that some of the information currently being provided by the school for parents about subjects needs to be up-dated. Incoming students also attend for an induction programme in the school. During this day they meet with senior students who are trained under the *Gluais* scheme to in-going provide mentoring support to first years.

All first year classes meet with guidance personnel throughout the year to receive assistance in settling into the school and so that any personal concerns can be addressed. Students are referred to the guidance team for extra support by staff members or can self refer for guidance. The aim of the guidance programme in junior cycle is to assist students to learn viable learning and personal skills, such as good learning strategies, increased self-confidence and decision making skills. In second year, contact is maintained by the guidance team with class groups to encourage the development of good time management and study skills. Individuals who require individual counselling support are also facilitated. As already identified by the team in their review of Guidance, some further development of the second year guidance programme should be considered. It is suggested that some additional inputs on career topics for second year groups should be included. These inputs would encourage more dialogue and reflection by students on possible career interests before subject and programme choices for senior cycle have to be made in third year. This should be achieved in collaboration with the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) programme. No formal guidance classes are timetabled for third year groups. Instead, class periods are borrowed from subject teachers by the team to facilitate the delivery of the guidance programme. Students receive good assistance to make suitable and appropriate subject choices, to consider the TY programme or make a direct transfer into senior cycle. The LCA programme is reported to be increasingly popular for some students, and is providing a good alternative for those who are interested in transferring directly to the world of work or to further education or training programmes.

There is no TY programme in the current school year because of a low take-up among third year students last year. However, the guidance programme for TY in the school guidance plan is well structured. It includes a full exploration of the world of work through a range of interventions including a work experience module. Fifth year students have no formal timetabled guidance classes but on-going contact is maintained with the guidance team through occasional classes. In addition, students can make appointments for individual consultations on careers and personal issues. The sixth year programme builds effectively on the guidance programmes in TY and in fifth year. It is well structured and assists students to become fully informed about third level and further education course options and application procedures. Good access for students to the well equipped ICT room to explore college websites is facilitated and students are encouraged to take an active role in developing individual career plans. Students choosing LCA have access to a wide range of guidance supports and have one timetabled class per week. Every assistance is provided for students to complete key assignments and plan suitable career paths.

Full support for groups and individuals making applications to the central application office (CAO) for third level colleges in Ireland and the united college application system (UCAS) for colleges in the UK is facilitated. A range of guest speakers is invited to the school and students can attend a number of college open days and other career events. Mock interview sessions are also arranged to provide familiarisation with job interviews. Students wishing to explore apprenticeship or other forms of training are also fully assisted. In order to expand students' awareness of the changing nature of the world of work and the wide range of new opportunities available in the work place, it is recommended that the school should consider asking past pupils to contribute information for students and parents on careers. In addition, recent past pupils could be asked to provide peer support for those entering third level and further education courses.

Good contacts have been established with a range of third level and further education colleges and with all relevant national and local agencies and bodies. Good referral pathways for students have been established and are being maintained. Excellent contacts are maintained with parents, who are kept fully informed about all developments through regular parents' information sessions attended by the guidance team. Individual parents can also seek an appointment with guidance staff. The school is to be commended in the way that attendance at continual professional development events, regular personal supervision sessions and career events is being facilitated for the guidance team.

Teaching and Learning

In the course of the inspection visit, one senior cycle group was visited, a sixth year Leaving Certificate class. The guidance lesson dealt with preparing students for the school's mock examinations. The methodologies selected to present and develop the topic were well chosen and

appropriate to the age and developmental level of the students. The lesson took place in the ICT room and each student had a computer to complete the planned assignment. The room is equipped with full Broadband access and excellent facilities to encourage individual research of selected college and other websites. Good advance planning was in evidence and viable learning objectives were established from the outset. The topic was well introduced and good and informative support materials were supplied. All students were actively engaged, demonstrated very competent computer skills and could carry out the task set by the teacher without assistance. Students were given good study tips and were then asked to research a number of websites designed to assist them to study effectively. It is suggested that, in order to make this lesson topic even more effective, consideration should be given to asking students in advance to prepare a personal short statement about how they like to study, and what obstacles they face in achieving set goals and targets. These could then form the basis of an exchange of views about studying and different styles of learning.

The school also facilitated the inspector to meet with a fifth year class. During this session, the inspector interacted with students and assisted them to complete a short questionnaire on Guidance, which is being administered by inspectors of Guidance in 50 second level schools throughout 2006/2007. This questionnaire aims to gather the views of senior cycle students on the Guidance they are receiving in schools. It is anonymous and invites a sample of senior cycle students in each of the schools included in this survey to respond to a series of questions about the Guidance provision in their school, and to comment on how useful and informative they have found the range of inputs that have been provided on careers and educational opportunities. Furthermore, the questionnaire invites them to state what changes they consider would improve the school's guidance programmes and to suggest what type of programme would give maximum benefit to students in senior cycle.

In both sessions, classroom management was excellent and very good learning was in evidence.

Assessment

The school makes appropriate and purposeful use of assessment tests and other instruments to assess learning and individuals' needs. In guidance, assessment is used very effectively to assist students to explore aptitudes and plan career paths. The school guidance plan documents fully the range of tests administered and all interest inventories. The suitability of tests is reviewed regularly within the school and new tests are being currently considered for inclusion in the guidance plan. It is advised that reference should be made to the Circular Letter 0008/2007 on testing in schools, which is available at www.education.ie. It is suggested that administration of the AH2 and the AH3 tests should be phased out and that more suitable tests should be selected. The Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) is administered to all students and they receive individual feedback on their results. This is used effectively to assist students to make subject and programme choices in senior cycle. Other aptitude tests are selected and administered to meet particular students' needs.

Good records of all one-to-one sessions held with students and of all follow-up actions to be taken are maintained. Individual student files are compiled and stored appropriately to provide maximum individual support. All meetings with staff and management are recorded. The initial destinations of all students leaving the school are being mapped annually to inform school planning.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

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

- The school has a well established guidance service. The guidance team works effectively and cooperatively in a whole school context within the school community and is exploring new ways to manage and deliver student support
- In conjunction with the school's pastoral care system and learning, language and guidance assistance, students have access to a very wide range of supports in Coláiste Chiaráin. The school is responding well to meeting the changing needs of learners within its community
- Innovative ways to provide a more formal structured approach to meet the personal counselling needs of students are being explored by the guidance team and school management
- The initial progression routes of students from the school are being mapped to inform school planning

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

- It is recommended that the guidance plan should be completed to indicate linkages with all school programmes and existing support structures. It should be circulated to staff, parents and students for consultation and then to the board of management.
- To enrich and augment the development of pastoral care and student support structures throughout the school, it is recommended that consideration should be given to the creation of a formal school care group that includes the guidance team
- To extend the guidance supports already being provided for students transferring to third level and further education, it is recommended that more past pupils be invited back to the school to provide information for students and parents choosing career progression-routes

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