

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

School name	St Mary's Secondary School
School address	Baldoye D13 W208
Roll number	60021U

Date of Inspection: 22-11-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in **Guidance** under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	21 – 22 November 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor

School context

St Mary's Secondary School is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls and operates under the trusteeship of the Religious Sisters of Charity. Current enrolment is 280 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed was very good.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is good, but at the time of the evaluation the school was not using its full allocation of Guidance hours.
- A comprehensive guidance programme is appropriately timetabled for TY, but guidance modules in fifth year and sixth year are provided on an intermittent and ad hoc basis.
- Currently TY students spend one full day a week and an additional two-week block on work experience; this represents over a quarter of the entire TY programme.
- It is evident that a caring and supportive ethos permeates many aspects of school life.
- The quality of individual planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department is good, but the current guidance plan is in draft form and some of the guidance-related policies require updating.

Recommendations

- School management should ensure that the full guidance allocation is used in order to meet more effectively the guidance needs of all students.
- School management, in consultation with the guidance counsellor, should ensure that the guidance modules in fifth year and sixth year are scheduled in a more consistent and regular manner.
- School management should keep the amount of time assigned to TY work experience under review to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences inherent in the TY programme.
- The whole-school guidance plan should be submitted to the board of management for ratification, and guidance-related policies should be reviewed and updated more regularly.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed was very good. All of the lessons were well planned and well structured. The learning intentions were shared with the students at the start of all lessons and revisited at the end to consolidate learning.
- TY students in particular, benefitted from a wide range of very useful resources which had been collated by the teacher into a student-friendly workbook. Students in the other lessons visited were also provided with useful handouts, work sheets and reflection exercises that challenged their understanding and deepened their learning.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was integrated effectively into the majority of lessons. Digital presentations were used very effectively to present difficult concepts in a clear and meaningful way to students. These short slide shows were visually very effective and had been specifically designed by the teacher with the student cohort in mind. Invariably the presentation was followed by questioning and an engaging task that challenged students to apply their new learning.
- All lessons were characterised by very respectful relationships and a high level of student engagement. A range of strategies was used to facilitate students to engage in very effective collaborative work and round table discussions. Feedback from group work was of a very high quality. Students demonstrated confidence in expressing themselves and listening to the contributions of others.
- Students' understanding during lessons was checked predominantly through the use of questioning. Students' responses were regularly challenged with probing questions from the teacher. There was some very good use of higher-order questions and wait time, in line with the school's self-evaluation (SSE) focus. However, there was scope to encourage more students to ask each other questions.
- Career investigations are integral to the school's TY programme. In line with the school's aim to promote oracy, TY students make an oral presentation on their investigation to their class and this forms a key assessment task in the students' portfolio.
- Standardised tests are administered in first year and TY to enable students to identify their strengths, aptitudes and abilities in line with good practice.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is good. The students benefit from the services of a part-time, fully-qualified and experienced guidance counsellor who devotes much of the allotted time to one-to-one guidance counselling.
- At the time of the evaluation the school was not using its full allocation of Guidance hours and there was a shortfall of two hours every week, a significant figure in view of the school's size. It is recommended that school management ensures that the full guidance allocation is used in order to meet more effectively the guidance needs of all students.
- A comprehensive guidance programme is appropriately timetabled in TY. The theme of this year's TY programme is "empowering women" and the school's science department has been promoting apprenticeships and careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) through on-site visits and guest speakers.

- TY students benefit from participating in work experience one day a week, as well as a two-week block, all of which helps them to broaden their career horizons and their understanding of the world of work. This time allocation represents more than a quarter of the entire TY programme. It is recommended that school management keeps the amount of time assigned to TY work experience under review to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences inherent in the TY programme.
- Commendably the school has also hosted Jigsaw training for TY students from other local schools. This is a peer education programme aimed at promoting positive mental health among young people.
- LCVP students benefit from a short work placement and guided visits to multi-national companies, the Baldoyle Forum and the nearby Solas Training Centre. It is positive that senior cycle students are facilitated to attend the Northside Partnership Careers Fair every year. These inter-community links are highly commended.
- Modules in Guidance are provided to students in fifth year and sixth year, but the scheduling of these modules is not optimal, as it involves the guidance counsellor borrowing small groups of students from subject teachers on an intermittent and ad-hoc basis. It is recommended that school management, in consultation with the guidance counsellor, ensures that the guidance modules in fifth and sixth year are scheduled in a more consistent and regular manner.
- Commendably, guidance provision is being extended to students at junior cycle. Close collaboration between the teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education, the form teachers and the guidance department was evident during College Awareness Week, when selected themes relating to work and college life were explored with all year groups. Second-year students also benefit from participating in the Pieta House Resilience Academy and the *Stand Up* programme.
- A comprehensive induction programme is in place to ensure a successful transition for students from primary school into post primary school and this includes a Big Sister mentoring programme as well as subject sampling.
- The guidance counsellor collaborates well with the special educational needs (SEN) department and a wide range of staff, including year heads and the care team. Effective links have been established with the relevant support agencies, including the Listen Project and Baldoyle Family Resource Centre.
- The school community is commended on the range of activities it provides to promote student wellbeing. During the evaluation it was evident that a caring and supportive ethos permeated many aspects of school life. However, a Wellbeing team has not yet been established in the school. It is recommended that a team be established to coordinate this area of learning at junior cycle on a more formal basis.
- Every TY student is currently assigned a teacher who acts as a mentor and provides additional support to that student throughout the year. The school reports that this mentoring system has proved very successful to date. Consideration should be given to extending this mentoring system to sixth year students in order to support them in their final year.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of individual planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department is good, but the current guidance plan is only in draft form and needs to be ratified by the board of management.

- All guidance-related policies are in place, but many are over five years old. Good progress has been made in redrafting the school's data protection policy in light of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). At the time of the evaluation, the critical incident policy and anti-bullying policy were being updated and prepared for ratification by the board of management. It is recommended that the whole-school guidance plan be submitted to the board for ratification, and all guidance-related policies be reviewed and updated more regularly.
- Record keeping is of a good standard in the department and shows due consideration for ethical issues, such as confidentiality and the security of test materials.
- Communication with parents is effective but the guidance section of the school website is under-developed.
- The guidance counsellor is a member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and attends continuing professional development on a regular basis. It is positive that the school hosts a guidance counselling supervision group that aims to promote very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St Mary's Secondary School Baldoyle, welcomes the very positive inspection report on the Guidance Counselling Department.

The Board notes the report's finding that 'the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed was very good'. In particular, the Board is very pleased that there was evidence that a 'caring and supportive ethos permeates many aspects of school life'. The Board notes 'commendably, guidance provision is being extended to students at junior cycle' and 'a comprehensive induction programme is in place to ensure a successful transition for students from primary school into post primary school and this includes a Big Sister mentoring programme as well as subject sampling'.

The acknowledgment of this combination of effective and highly effective practice is most welcome.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Board would like it noted that the Guidance Counsellor is also the Sixth Year English Teacher and that she is timetabled fully for all her contractual hours.

The Board was aware that the Guidance shortfall was difficult to fill, due to a shortage of available qualified teaching personnel in this area.

The Board will offer part-time hours in addition to the Guidance Counsellor's hours to increase the guidance provision this year.

The Board has ratified the whole school Guidance Plan at its most recent meeting.

The Board is very happy to review the Transition Year work experience and look at the timetabling of modular options for guidance at senior cycle level.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;