

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

School name	Dominican College
School address	Sion Hill Blackrock Co Dublin
Roll number	60070K

Date of Inspection: 30-11-2017



WHAT IS A 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.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	29-11-2017 and 30-11-2017
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 two class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor

School context

Dominican College is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. It has a current enrolment of 441 students. It offers Junior Cycle (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. Guidance is formally provided on the timetable in TY and in sixth year and informally, through the provision of social, personal and health education (SPHE) lessons from first year to sixth year. The guidance counsellor teaches one guidance lesson per week to sixth-year students, while two other teachers deliver the guidance lessons in TY.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from fair to very good, with best practice noted in the lesson that was active and collaborative and where the student voice was heard.
- While many good measures are undertaken by teachers to provide aspects of whole-school guidance, there are significant weaknesses in the planning and curricular delivery of Guidance and these require immediate attention.
- A very limited guidance curriculum is in place with no formal programme in fifth year.
- The whole-school guidance plan is many years out of date and there is no whole-school guidance planning team established.
- Highly effective student support structures are in place with clear referral pathways, student files, and good communication systems in operation.
- A very comprehensive and effective student mentoring and academic tracking system is in operation to support students' performance at all levels of ability.

Recommendations

- All teachers should include active methodologies and collaborative activities in lessons to engage students and improve the balance between teacher and student voice.
- The guidance counsellor should play a more active role in guidance delivery across the school and link with other teachers delivering programmes at both junior and senior cycle.
- The guidance counsellor should take a leading role in the development of an up-to-date guidance programme, including a detailed curriculum with clear learning outcomes, appropriate assessment, supported by planned guidance-related activities, trips and speakers.
- The guidance counsellor should investigate opportunities to attend guidance-related continuing professional development (CPD) such as the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) psychometric assessment training, JC Wellbeing, counselling supervision and other appropriate activities, and discuss a schedule of training with senior management as part of overall guidance planning.

- School management should form a whole-school guidance planning team to identify the guidance needs of the school and collaboratively develop the annual guidance plan to be submitted to the board of management for approval in line with Circular 0010/2017.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching observed ranged from fair to very good. The most effective activities were those that encouraged active participation and student collaboration.
- Teachers selected appropriate guidance topics for the lessons. One group discussed learning styles while another considered the employment sectors with current job vacancies and expected employment growth. These activities would have been enhanced by asking students to predict levels of growth in advance and then compare their responses to the answers, thereby developing their independent thinking skills.
- Good preparation was evident in all lessons observed with planned work-sheets, slide shows and appropriate use of digital technologies to support learning.
- Interactions among students and between students and teachers were respectful and positive. Students were very comfortable asking questions and responding to the teachers.
- In one lesson, students worked effectively in groups and were observed working very purposefully and enjoying the activity. This was supported by very good in-class teacher support and well-managed, clear, and timed activities.
- When the lesson was mainly teacher-led, students were more passive and were observed disengaging. To support better student engagement, teachers should include some active methodologies which give students opportunities to discuss ideas and work in pairs or groups.
- Students in TY and LCVP keep an online file of guidance-related work and it is evident that very good progress has been made. As part of their overall grade, a number of guidance projects are submitted for assessment and feedback; this is to be commended. No guidance-related assignments are submitted in other senior cycle guidance classes. This practice should be reviewed as part of the guidance plan and consideration given to including meaningful assignments for senior cycle students.
- Through interactions with students, it was clear that they have good career ambitions, and are supported by teachers who set high expectations and actively encourage them to progress in their education.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Many good measures are undertaken by teachers to provide aspects of whole-school guidance through SPHE and TY careers lessons, but there are significant weaknesses in the curricular provision and delivery of Guidance.
- Junior cycle students receive satisfactory guidance support through the tutor and year head system and during SPHE lessons. In TY and LCVP, a number of teachers effectively deliver the guidance aspects of the programme and assess students' guidance assignments. The sixth-year students have a weekly guidance lesson with the guidance counsellor, but fifth-years do not have a formal programme of lessons resulting in a deficit in guidance provision.

- There is scope for the guidance counsellor to play a more active role in guidance delivery across the school, to include a formal programme for fifth years, and to link with other teachers delivering programmes at both junior and senior cycle.
- The guidance counsellor is allocated an appropriate amount of time to provide one-to-one support for students. All fifth and sixth-year students are invited to attend for a guidance meeting to discuss their education and career plans. TY students discuss subject and education choice decisions with their year heads, tutors, and guidance teachers; however, additional support from the guidance counsellor is also available.
- There are a number of highly effective student support teams in place to monitor student welfare and attainment. A comprehensive student mentoring and tracking system has been developed which incorporates a multifaceted approach using a very good range of standardised assessments which measure ability, attitude to school and self, school performance scores, and other relevant information.
- An example of an innovative targeted differentiation programme is a new mentoring system for students who fall into the gifted category. Teachers volunteer to work with individual students. They encourage, guide and challenge students to make exceptional progress in their studies and education plans. This targeted differentiation strategy is to be commended.
- Students are afforded many diverse leadership development opportunities through participation on the student council, clubs and committees and opportunities to become prefects and mentors. Social, personal development and positive mental health are effectively promoted through a variety of high-quality activities, including themed weeks and clubs, in areas such as the arts, sports, mind, body, soul, environment, and social awareness.
- It is positive that students and teachers participate in the information sessions for subject and programme options and that past students are invited to assist with mock interviews. This close collaboration and networking is praiseworthy.
- While school management reports that support is provided for attendance at CPD, the guidance counsellor has not attended recent training organised by the NCGE, JC Wellbeing, or regular counselling supervision. It is recommended that the guidance counsellor investigate available guidance-related CPD and discuss this with senior management as part of overall guidance planning.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Overall guidance planning is weak with a very outdated guidance plan in place. The current guidance plan has not been fully revised since it was developed in 2009. There are serious weaknesses in the planning process which need immediate attention.
- At the time of the inspection there was no guidance curriculum in place except for junior cycle guidance delivered through the SPHE programme and the TY careers plan. The guidance counsellor should lead the development of a guidance curriculum with clear learning outcomes and success criteria, for all year groups. In addition, a clear outline of guidance activities, trips, speakers, and presentations should be included in the plan.
- School management should support the planning process by forming a whole-school guidance planning team to assess the guidance needs at both junior and senior cycle, and ensure that a suitable programme is developed to meet those needs on an annual basis.

- This annual guidance plan should be submitted to the board for approval in line with Circular 0010/2017.
- Other guidance-related policies such as critical incident, change of subject, and anti-bullying are in place. It is suggested that policies are kept under review and updated frequently.
- Record keeping practices by the guidance counsellor are less than satisfactory and need to improve. All meetings should be recorded on a standard template and retained for reference purposes for the appropriate time.

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. The board of management of the school 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.

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 Sion Hill College welcomes the many positive aspects of the inspector's evaluation of Guidance.

In particular, the Board notes the inspector's finding that there are "highly effective student support structures are in place with clear referral pathways, student files and good communication systems". It also notes the "very comprehensive and effective student mentoring and academic tracking system to support students' performance at all levels of ability". In particular it welcomes the inspector's commendation with regard to the targeted differentiated strategy for students who fall into the gifted category and notes that "social, personal development and positive mental health are effectively promoted".

It also notes a number of shortcomings which are being immediately addressed by the Board, senior management and the Guidance Counsellor.

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

A new guidance office has been built over the Christmas break to enable the separation of the teaching and counselling work of the Counsellor and to enable the Counsellor to create a new record keeping system. An individual Career File has been created for each student and stored in the new guidance office.

Whole school planning team has been established and a first draft of a whole school guidance plan has been agreed. The guidance counsellor is taking a leading role in this work and will link with other teachers delivering programmes at both junior and senior cycle. This will be signed off by the Board in February 2018.

Formal programme of 5th year guidance to be introduced in 2018/2019

The guidance counsellor will attend all of the CPD recommended by the inspector and will undertake CPD in active learning methodologies.

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;