Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aínm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>St Columba's College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Whitechurch Dublin 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>60320H</td>
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Date of Inspection: 14-02-2019
**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 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.

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>13-02-2019 and 14-02-2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during two class periods which were specially convened for the evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Feedback to the principal and head of careers</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and key staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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School context
St Columba’s College is a co-educational, fee-charging, voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 326 students, serving an urban catchment area in south Dublin. The school offers a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme in addition to the Junior Cycle and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings
- During the two guidance lessons which were specially delivered for this evaluation teaching and learning was of a high quality, students were engaged in active group work and stated they enjoyed and found the lessons valuable.
- Guidance provision is not sufficient; Guidance is not provided for on students’ timetables and students do not have appropriate access to a Teaching Council registered and qualified guidance counsellor.
- There is a commendable shared whole-school approach to guidance, a significant number of staff effectively support students with social, personal, education and career decisions.
- Students in fifth-year are provided with an academic tutor who very effectively assists them in setting academic targets, monitoring academic performance and preparation of college personal statements.
- While student welfare is given a very high priority, the student support team referral systems and meeting procedures are not sufficiently formal.
- Current guidance planning practices are unsatisfactory; the guidance programme is not collectively planned or evaluated in a co-ordinated way and the whole-school guidance plan lacks sufficient detail.

Recommendations
- Senior management should oversee the provision, by a Teaching Council registered and qualified guidance counsellor, of an appropriate series of curricular guidance inputs at junior and senior cycle through a modular or weekly taught guidance programme.
- Senior management should provide time for students to individually access a fully qualified guidance counsellor during the school day.
- Senior management should schedule a weekly meeting of the student support team and devise an appropriate standardised referral form.
- Senior management should oversee the formation of a whole-school guidance planning team to collectively plan and evaluate the whole-school guidance programme on an annual basis.
• When preparing the whole-school guidance plan, the whole-school guidance team should include detail regarding all social, personal, educational and career guidance supports, as well as guidance-related curricular and co-curricular activities.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

• Guidance lessons are not usually delivered as part of the curriculum for students. During this evaluation, two lessons were specially delivered. Students reported that they found the lessons interesting and valuable.
• Teaching in both lessons was of a high quality, the teacher was well prepared and effectively managed the pace of each lesson very well. Learning was effectively supported by appropriate use of slide shows, worksheets and a useful video clip.
• The teacher created an atmosphere which was conducive to learning through positive and affirming interactions with students. Students’ contributions to lessons were very good, they demonstrated thoughtful and interesting insights on the topics of exam preparation and academic performance.
• During lessons, the teacher effectively provided students with opportunities to work together and share ideas. Students were observed actively engaged in group and pair work which enhanced their knowledge of the areas being discussed.
• As there are no guidance lessons, there are currently no guidance assignments. It is recommended that appropriate assignments be included in the curricular guidance plan once it is developed for junior and senior cycle students.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Guidance is not provided for on the students’ timetable. There are no guidance lessons at junior or senior cycle and no time is provided for students to access a guidance counsellor for one-to-one appointments. Students have a good understanding of the career and education paths available to them but have not been afforded an opportunity to discuss the full breadth of career options with a qualified guidance counsellor. It is recommended that senior management oversee the provision of an appropriate series of curricular guidance inputs at junior and senior cycle through a modular or weekly taught guidance programme.
• There is no appropriately qualified guidance counsellor leading and delivering the guidance programme. Senior management should appoint an appropriately qualified Teaching Council registered teacher with a guidance qualification to oversee the guidance programme and provide both classroom guidance and individual support to students.
• There is a commendable shared whole school approach to all three aspects of guidance with many staff assisting students with social, personal, educational and career decisions. Staff frequently meet students during their non-teaching hours and are very generous with their time.
• Wellbeing is very effectively promoted through whole-school initiatives such as mental health week, anti-bullying week and talks on physical and mental health. Individual students are further supported by access to two counsellors, a chaplain, a nurse on campus and external links with mental health agencies.
• Students in fifth-year are provided with an academic tutor who very effectively assists them in setting academic targets, monitoring academic performance and preparation of college personal statements. This is very good support for fifth-year students and senior
management should explore how this model of support could be extended to other year groups at particular transition points.

- Over the years, members of staff have developed highly specialist knowledge regarding overseas university applications to Europe, America and the United Kingdom. A core team of teachers provide very good support to students wishing to make applications to colleges in these localities. This is a highly effective whole-school approach to guidance and is commended.

- A very dedicated student support team meets every week or fortnight to discuss students of concern. At present the meeting is not scheduled for a particular time or day and usually takes place at lunchtime. This informal arrangement should be replaced with a formal scheduled weekly meeting. An informal referral system operates and this should be improved by the student support team devising a referral form in line with the National Educational Psychological Service guidelines, Establishing a Student Support Team.

- Senior cycle students are provided with a small number of opportunities to attend career events. A satisfactory variety of speakers from Irish and international universities visit the school and meet students. There is scope for the TY planning team to develop the TY guidance programme so students are afforded greater opportunities to attend college events and career talks while they consider their career and education pathways.

- Students are successfully supported to pursue education paths in Science with four optional Science subjects available at senior cycle. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are promoted very effectively through various co-curricular activities. It is notable that a significant majority of past students are pursuing STEM-related further and higher education courses.

- A member of the middle leadership team effectively manages subject choices in the school. Students are given free choice and the option bands are generated based on their preferences with almost all students getting their preferred options. Both senior cycle and junior cycle students and parents are provided with high quality information on subject choices.

- At the time of the evaluation there was no dedicated office or room for Guidance. It is recommended that senior management identifies an appropriate and well-equipped space for one-to-one guidance appointments so students can meet the current head of careers in a safe and confidential environment.

- The online sharing platform is used well by staff for students and parents to access career and education information.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Current guidance planning practices require improvement; the guidance plan lacks sufficient detail and the guidance programme is not collectively planned in a co-ordinated way.

- While there are many teachers working together to support students, they do not meet as a whole-school guidance planning team to plan the guidance programme for the year. Senior management should oversee the formation of a whole-school guidance planning team to collectively plan and evaluate the guidance programme on an annual basis.

- The current guidance plan has some strengths insofar as it identifies staff involved and some career and education activities that take place in the school to support students when making decisions about college applications or college choices. However, the plan lacks detail regarding the full range of whole-school guidance activities and there is no comprehensive guidance curricular and co-curricular programme. The guidance department should collectively develop a comprehensive whole-school guidance plan including all social
personal, educational and career guidance supports as well as guidance-related curricular and co-curricular activities.

- While many staff effectively support students and hold valuable meetings with students to discuss academic progress or career plans, record keeping practices are individual and informal. It is recommended that senior management devise a one-to-one meetings policy so meetings with students are recorded on a standardised template.

- A number of guidance-related policies and procedures are up-to-date; these include the anti-bullying policy, critical incident plan and change of subject procedures.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and head of careers 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 factual content of the inspection report is fair, although it should be borne in mind that the department provides only 0.26 of a salary for Guidance Counselling and thus the College has developed a system in which many teachers contribute to the overall provision in terms of university advice and counselling. It is true that we have been operating with a head of Guidance who is not fully qualified but in many ways the provision heretofore has been of a high standard, if rather narrow or limited. The report is fair in acknowledging good practice as well as indicating areas for improvement.

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 is pleased to see that much of what goes on in the sphere of Guidance is considered good practice. We are delighted that the report acknowledges the whole school approach to guidance and the high priority given to pupil welfare which we regard as fundamental to our philosophy. Nevertheless, it accepts that there are some shortcomings in its current provision and sees this report as an opportunity to reassess its Guidance provision in order to provide an outstanding service to our pupils. Plans are already under way to appoint a qualified/qualifying Guidance Counsellor, who will oversee the development of the department, co-ordinate work experience, and assist with standardised testing, while bearing in mind that, with only 26% of the salary covered by government, the appointee will need to either be part-time or be able to contribute in broader ways to the life of the College.

Management will ensure that provision is made on the timetable for whole year group sessions and one on one consultations. This might involve sourcing outside experts, as well as making use of the considerable expertise currently in the Common Room, who are well versed in matters of CAO, UCAS, European and US university entrance, and who will continue to contribute in these areas.

The process has begun with the Parents Association and the Old Columban Society to build up a network of careers advisors from the broader school community.

As can be seen the Board is taking seriously the need to raise its game in the sphere of Guidance Counselling. We have always had a team approach to covering all the bases, but there is a need for further coordination and greater planning. The Board is determined to act on the advice given and looks forward to moving forward over the next couple of years.
**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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> 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 <strong>very good</strong> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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