

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Mary's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	St. Mary's Secondary School Holy Faith Convent Glasnevin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60770P

Date of Inspection: 11-10-2019



**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	10-11-2019 and 11-10-2019
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 principals and guidance counsellors

School context

Saint Mary's Holy Faith Convent Secondary School is a girls' voluntary Catholic school which operates under the auspices of Le Chéile Schools Trust. Current enrolment is 805 students. The programmes offered are the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; in a minority of lessons the teachers' voice predominated and not enough opportunities were provided for student activity and discussion.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was integrated into the majority of lessons; commendably modules in Digital Literacy have been introduced in first year and TY.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good; there is a highly commendable integrated whole-school and collaborative approach to supporting students.
- A key initiative in the school is a cross-curricular, gender-balance project to encourage more female students to take up apprenticeships and careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM).
- Individual planning and preparation in the guidance department are of a good quality; the TY guidance module requires further development and the current guidance plan is only in draft form.
- The quality of record keeping in the guidance department varies, ranging from satisfactory to good, and practices are not consistent across the department.

Recommendations

- Teachers should ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved between teacher-led activity and student engagement in all lessons.
- The TY guidance module should be extended to include additional elements of career guidance, including career investigations, CV writing and mock interviews.
- The whole-school guidance plan should be referred to the board of management for ratification.
- In the interests of consistency and accountability, more detailed records of all referrals and meetings with students should be maintained on an agreed template.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good. All of the lessons were well planned and had clear learning intentions, which were shared with the students.
- All lessons were delivered at an appropriate pitch and at a measured pace to facilitate students to process and reflect on their learning. The relationships between teachers and students were observed to be warm and encouraging. In their interactions, students demonstrated a high level of prior learning and a clear understanding of the various career paths and course options open to them.
- The quality of assessment was good overall. Teachers had recently encouraged students to save their work in folders, so their work could be readily accessed and assessed.
- Students' understanding during lessons was checked predominantly through the use of questioning. In the most effective lessons observed, the teachers moved around the room assessing students' progress and providing individual support to students. At the end of one of the lessons observed students used exit tickets to note one key learning they had gleaned from the lesson and another aspect that required more clarification. The teacher reported that this feedback would be used to inform planning for the next lesson. This good practice should be extended to more lessons.
- The most effective lessons observed were characterised by very good student engagement; students were observed working effectively and collaboratively on a task and their feedback from group work was of a high quality. In a minority of lessons the teachers' voice predominated and not enough opportunities were provided to facilitate student activity and discussion. It is recommended that teachers ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved between teacher-led activity and student engagement in all lessons.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was integrated into the majority of lessons, but not without some difficulty. In one lesson visited problems were encountered on the day with the internet connection and this hampered student access to guidance resources on line. In another lesson visited a small number of senior-cycle students demonstrated an unfamiliarity with the computer keyboard and poor keyboard skills generally.
- School management stated that the internet connection and wifi connectivity usually worked well. However they were aware of issues around digital literacy and were addressing the problem at whole-school level through the school's digital strategy. Commendably, the school has already introduced a Digital Literacy module for students in first year and TY. It is a very positive development that all TY students take four additional modules in Coding, Multimedia, Smart Skills and Music Technology.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good. There is a highly commendable integrated, whole-school and collaborative approach to supporting students. Both the principal and deputy principal are former guidance counsellors and are very supportive of Guidance.
- The guidance team includes one full-time and one part-time school guidance counsellor. There is a strong focus on one-to-one guidance counselling, while a visiting psychotherapist

also provides a small number of additional hours of counselling supports. The guidance team are key members of the student support team that meets weekly.

- The facilities for guidance counselling are very good and include a guidance suite and a supervised “chill-out” area for students who may be experiencing a personal upset for a short period of time.
- Guidance modules are appropriately timetabled in sixth year and follow a regular schedule. Modules in Guidance are also provided in fifth year, but are held less regularly. It is recommended that school management ensure that classroom guidance in fifth year is provided on a more regular, sustained and consistent basis.
- It is commendable that TY students are facilitated to attend a number of college open days and career talks. The guidance team provides modules to TY groups on student empowerment as part of a programme supported by Dublin City University (DCU). However, there is scope to provide more career guidance as part of this module. It is recommended that the TY guidance module be extended to include additional elements of career guidance, including career investigations, CV writing and mock interviews. This should assist TY students to prepare for the world of work and their two-week work experience programme which is held in February every year.
- The school provides a wide range of subject options and subject sampling is an integral part of the first year and TY programmes.
- A key initiative in the school is a cross-curricular gender-balance project to encourage more female students to take up apprenticeships and careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM). This involves a high level of collaboration between a number of subject departments, past pupils and outside agencies.
- Commendably guidance-related learning has been extended at junior cycle through the school’s Wellbeing programme. There is evidence of effective collaborative planning between the guidance department and the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) department in this regard. Junior cycle students have also benefitted from the introduction of the Pieta House Resilience Academy and the *Get Up, Stand Up* programme, as well as college awareness initiatives linked with DCU. It is a positive development that other worthwhile programmes, such as Friends for Youth and restorative practice, are to be introduced before the end of the current academic year and teachers have already accessed training in this regard.
- Valuable and worthwhile links have been established with the local community. Senior cycle students are facilitated to attend the Fingal Partnership Education Fair, as well as a careers exhibition which is organised collectively by a number of schools in the Finglas and Glasnevin area. This inter-school and inter-community collaboration is highly commended.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning and preparation in the guidance department are of a good quality, but the current guidance plan is only in draft form. It is recommended that the whole-school guidance plan be referred to the board of management for ratification.
- All guidance-related policies, including those relating to critical incidents, anti-bullying and data protection, are up to date. The school’s policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) dates back to 2011, and school management acknowledges the need to review and update it as a priority.

- The quality of record keeping in the guidance department varies, ranging from satisfactory to good, and practices vary across the department. In the interests of consistency, greater accuracy and accountability, it is recommended that more detailed records be kept of all meetings with students. Agreed templates should be used for referrals and to record meetings, in line with good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and guidance counsellors 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 is very pleased that the Report recognises and affirms positively the work being done by the Guidance Department and the school where a highly commendable integrated whole-school and collaborative approach to supporting students is identified. The report also identifies our strong focus on individual counselling which is core to our pastoral approach.

We are happy that the report also highlights:

- The delivery of all lessons at an appropriate pitch and at a measured pace to facilitate students to process and reflect on their learning.
- The warm and encouraging relationships that exist between teachers and students.
- The very good facilities for guidance counselling including a guidance suite and a 'chill-out area'.
- The demonstration by students of a high level of prior learning and a clear understanding of the various career paths and course options open to them.
- The individual support provided to students as part of assessment practices and the good practice of using exit tickets to note key learning and areas requiring clarification.
- The level of student engagement, where students were observed working effectively and collaboratively on a task and producing high quality feedback from group work.
- The positive whole-school developments in Digital Literacy as evidenced by the provision of five modules for TY students – Office 365, Coding, Multimedia, Smart Skills and Music Technology.
- The extension of guidance-related learning at junior cycle through the school's Wellbeing Programme which is commendable, and the effective collaborative planning that happens between the Guidance Department and the SPHE Department in this regard.
- The valuable and worthwhile links that have been established with the local community.

The Board of Management welcomes this very positive and very promising report and notes that the observations and recommendations made by the inspectorate are quite specific and can be readily addressed through the ongoing commitment of all concerned.

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 of Management acknowledges the main recommendations of the report:

- *Teachers should ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved between teacher-led activity and student engagement in all lessons.*

The report highlights very good student engagement in the most effective lessons observed and the board acknowledges the value of having this balance in all classes to ensure that student voice is integral to our teaching and learning strategies. We encourage a flexible approach where lesson plans can be altered in the event of unforeseen time losses to ensure this balance is achieved. Management has discussed this with the team members who are ready and willing and will endeavour to ensure this balance is achieved going forward.

- *The TY guidance module should be extended to include additional elements of career guidance, including career investigations, CV writing and mock interviews.*

School management and the guidance team have considered this recommendation and a more specifically career focussed module will be included in the TY curriculum going forward to ensure that these important elements are not overlooked. Students do have interview experience during

the year, first at Christmas when tutors interview students about their experience of TY to date and at the end of the year when outside interviewers visit the school to interview the students at the end of the programme. The proposed module will complement good practice already in place.

- *The whole-school guidance plan should be referred to the board of management for ratification.*

Management is fully supportive of this recommendation and the plan which has been reviewed and updated is to be shared with all stakeholders before the next board of management meeting in January 2020 when it will be proposed for ratification.

- *The whole-school guidance plan should be referred to the board of management for ratification.*

Management is fully supportive of this recommendation and the plan which has been reviewed and updated is to be shared with all stakeholders before the next board of management meeting in January 2020 when it will be proposed for ratification.

- *In the interests of consistency and accountability, more detailed records of all referrals and meetings with students should be maintained on an agreed template.*

The guidance team had only been working together for one month before the inspection was announced and were aware of the need for agreed templates. Since the inspection these templates (for record keeping and referrals) have been drawn up and are now in use and will be available to all personnel who join the department into the future.

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;