

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

**Subject Inspection in Guidance**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St Mary's Diocesan School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Beamore Road Drogheda Co. Louth
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63841E

**Date of Inspection: 22-03-2019**



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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; a response was not received from the board.

## **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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	21 & 22-03-2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with the senior management team, guidance team and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and the guidance team</li></ul>

### School context

St Mary's Diocesan School is a Catholic secondary school for boys and operates under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath. Current student enrolment is 842. The programmes offered are the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good overall, but students would have benefitted from more opportunities for class discussion in some lessons.
- Very effective assessment for learning strategies (AfL) were used in all of the lessons observed.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for guidance-related activities is good, but timetabled provision for classroom guidance is not adequate.
- The proposed addition of a second guidance counsellor to the school is a welcome development in view of the current high demands on the service.
- A highly commendable integrated, whole-school and collaborative approach is taken to supporting students.
- Planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a high quality, but there is a need for greater consistency and detail in the recording of meetings with individual students.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should further extend opportunities for whole-class discussion in lessons in order to deepen students' learning.
- School management should timetable modules in Guidance on a rotational basis for all senior-cycle students from the start of the next academic year.
- The guidance team should include greater detail in its written record of individual meetings with students and use a common template to ensure greater consistency across the department.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. All of the lessons visited were characterised by a sense of purpose, appropriate pace and challenge, and a high level of engagement and enjoyment by the students. The relationships between students and their teachers in the lessons visited were warm, supportive and affirming.
- The lessons observed were very well planned. The topics were relevant and were based on students' interests and learning needs. Resources were used effectively and these included digital presentations, short video clips, work sheets and mini white boards.
- Commendably, each lesson began with an assessment of the students' prior learning and teachers proceeded to build incrementally on students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Very effective AfL strategies were used in all of the lessons observed. A clear statement of the learning intentions was made at the outset of each lesson and revisited at the end to consolidate learning. Other very effective strategies observed included *think, pair and share* activities and personal self-reflection exercises.
- Students demonstrated high levels of participation and engagement in their learning, and were provided with many opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively. Students demonstrated confidence in volunteering answers and contributing their ideas in their feedback. However there was scope to extend opportunities for whole-class discussion in a plenary session in the latter half of lessons. It is recommended that teachers further extend opportunities for class discussion in lessons in order to deepen students' learning.
- In one very effective mixed-ability lesson, differentiation was evident where four different pathways into particular careers were explored - via apprenticeships, further education, and level 7 and level 8 degrees in higher education. This highly commendable approach facilitated all students to meaningfully engage with the topic.
- The quality of in-class assessment was good overall with many examples of higher-order questioning. Commendably the teachers moved around the room, assessing students' progress and supporting them individually.
- An appropriate range of interest inventories, aptitude and ability tests is administered to students. The outcomes of these assessments are discussed with the students with a view to assisting them to choose a suitable career path.
- It is commendable that members of the senior management team use the results from cognitive ability tests, in-school examinations and certificate examination to track student progress. Members of the senior management team reported that they meet with all senior-cycle students individually for a focused discussion in order to assist them with their goal-setting and achieving their full potential.

### 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for guidance-related activities is good, but timetabled provision for classroom guidance is not adequate.
- School management is supportive of the service. The guidance team comprises a full-time guidance counsellor and a second member of staff who is currently completing a recognised course in school guidance counselling. The proposed addition of a second guidance counsellor to the department is a welcome development in view of the school's size and the current high demands on the service.

- Currently timetabled classroom provision for Guidance is largely confined to fifth year, where modules in Guidance and a *Mind-Out* programme in positive mental health are provided on a rotational basis. In the case of other year groups, the guidance team borrows classes from subject teachers to provide guidance inputs and career talks. The remaining hours are allocated to guidance counselling with individual students. School management is aware of the limitations of current timetabled provision and is already taking steps to address the issue. It is recommended that, as an initial step, modules in Guidance be timetabled on a rotational basis for all senior-cycle students from the start of the next academic year.
- Career talks and guest speakers from colleges are regularly facilitated for senior-cycle students. It is positive that students and parents are kept informed of career events and open days through the school's social media accounts, including an 'app'. It is equally commendable that the school co-operates with other local schools in organising an annual Careers and College Fair for students who are living in the town and its hinterland.
- Work experience is a key feature of both the TY and LCVP programmes, and is closely monitored and evaluated. The TY work experience module, for example, is evaluated by employers, teachers and the students themselves, and counts significantly for credits as part of the overall assessment of the programme.
- A highly commendable integrated, whole-school and collaborative approach is taken to supporting students. The guidance team works very closely with the special educational needs (SEN) department, the Wellbeing team and other staff to provide a very supportive and caring environment for all students.
- Worthwhile activities to promote student wellbeing include a cyber safety day, an active schools week and a student-led Positivity Week, with a daily theme linked to the Wellbeing indicators. The school already participates in the Health Promoting Schools initiative, and is currently working towards the award of an Amber Flag in recognition of its promotion of positive mental health.
- The Student Support Team meets regularly and discusses student referrals. There is evidence of close communication and collaboration between the guidance team and the senior management team. Effective links have been established with outside agencies and support services, including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Health Service Executive, Tusla and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

### **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a high quality.
- The guidance counsellor regularly engages in continuing professional development, and recently attended an Erasmus+ programme on narrative coaching and guidance in the wider European context.
- The whole-school guidance plan is quite comprehensive, but it should include additional details of the many wellbeing activities and supports available at whole-school level.
- Guidance-related policies such as those relating to anti-bullying and critical incidents have recently been reviewed and are up to date.
- Records of meetings with students are maintained and stored securely. These show due consideration for ethical issues such as confidentiality, the security of test materials and data protection. However, some of the records relating to individual meetings with students lack sufficient detail. It is recommended that the guidance team include more detail in their written record of individual meetings with students and use a common recording template to ensure greater consistency across the department.

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

## 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;