

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

**Subject Inspection in Guidance**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Drogheda Grammar School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Mornington Road Drogheda County Louth
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63870L

**Date of Inspection: 19-09-2017**



### **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.

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.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11-09-2017 & 19-09-2017
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor 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 principal and guidance counsellor</li></ul>

### School Context

Drogheda Grammar School is a co-educational, fee-paying school with a current enrolment of 320 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, as well as a compulsory Transition Year (TY).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; there was scope to clarify and consolidate the learning intentions in some lessons.
- Assessment practices in relation to Guidance are particularly effective and well established in TY.
- While some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, there was scope for more collaborative work among students in some lessons.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good, although there is scope for greater collaboration in some areas.
- The school demonstrates a very strong commitment to supporting student well-being.
- The quality of planning and preparation in the guidance department is good; certain aspects of the guidance plan and a related policy would benefit from a review.

#### Recommendations

- A clear statement of the learning intentions should be made at the outset of lessons and revisited at the end to assess and consolidate learning.
- The very good practice of active, collaborative learning methodologies that was observed in one guidance lesson should be extended to more lessons.
- There should be closer collaboration between the guidance department, the student council, and the organisers of the health promotion and anti-bullying weeks, in the context of a more whole-school co-ordinated approach to supporting student well-being.
- The guidance plan should be revised to include greater detail about the roles and responsibilities of all staff who are involved in providing student supports.
- The school's Critical Incident Management Plan should be reviewed and updated in line with the most recent NEPS publication *Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools* (2016).

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with some instances of very good practice noted. All lessons were characterised by a very positive rapport between the teacher and students.
- While the topic of the lessons was shared in all cases, there was scope to clarify and consolidate the learning intentions in two of the three lessons observed. It is recommended that a clear statement of the learning intentions be made at the outset of lessons and revisited at the end to assess and consolidate learning.
- A wide range of paper-based resources was prepared and used effectively to support student learning. Opportunities to add variety to the range of resources used during the hour-long lessons, through the use of information and communications technology (ICT) for example, were not fully exploited during the evaluation.
- Some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed and these included opportunities for student self-reflection. There was scope for more pair work, group work and focused discussion among students in some of the lessons observed.
- Very good practice was observed in a fifth-year lesson where the teacher defined the learning intentions clearly and revisited them at various stages to assess and consolidate the students' learning. Opportunities were provided for students to work both independently and collaboratively in a very purposeful manner. A *think, pair and share* activity was used effectively to enhance students' learning experiences. Students contributed their opinions and experiences to class discussion with confidence. It is recommended that this very good practice of active, collaborative learning be extended to more lessons.
- Assessment practices in the guidance department include not only assessment of knowledge, but also assessment of skills, values and dispositions. These practices are particularly effective and well established in TY. They include an assessment of students' career and course investigations, presentations on work experience and one-to-one portfolio interviews at the end of the year. It is commendable that a comment on students' progress in Guidance is included on school reports for TY.

### 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good. The school benefits from the services of a full-time guidance counsellor. The guidance programme demonstrates a very good balance between personal and social, educational and career guidance counselling.
- Classroom guidance is timetabled for students in sixth year, and is provided on a rotating module basis to students in fifth year and TY. The guidance counsellor meets with first-year students on an individual and small-group basis to ensure a smooth transition into second level.
- During the evaluation there was evidence of highly commendable collaboration between the guidance department, the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator, year heads, the teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and the TY co-ordinator.
- Very good systems are in place for the transfer of primary students to the school, including a comprehensive induction programme. Effective use is made of the education passports and

the results of cognitive ability tests to provide supports for incoming students. Students sample optional subjects in the first term. It is laudable that mentoring and prefect systems, as well as a student council, have been established to support their peers and to provide opportunities for student leadership. A peer education programme is also provided by TY students.

- The school demonstrates a very strong commitment to supporting student well-being. Wellbeing has been formally introduced in first year, and programmes such as Friends for Life, Mind Yourself, Body Right and World of Work are also provided. Other supports include a breakfast club for first-year students and a host of extra-curricular activities to appeal to all interests. Weekly assemblies and a new tutor system have also been introduced.
- Cross-curricular activities include an anti-bullying week and health promotion week, and other wellness talks and activities for students, parents and staff. It is commendable that a whole-school approach is taken by staff to organising such events. In the context of developing a more co-ordinated approach, it is recommended that there should be closer collaboration between the guidance department, the student council and the anti-bullying and health promotion committees.
- The school's care team, comprising the senior management team and year heads, meet quite regularly and it is appropriate that these meetings are attended by the guidance counsellor and the SEN co-ordinator. The school has established effective referral pathways and external links with local agencies.
- Facilities for Guidance are very good and include access to a computer room.
- The guidance counsellor is a registered psychotherapist and values and engages in professional development, counselling supervision and professional collaboration with colleagues in neighbouring schools.

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

- The quality of planning and preparation in the guidance department is good. The guidance plan includes schemes of work and a detailed calendar of upcoming career events. It is recommended that the whole-school plan be revised to include greater detail about the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in providing student supports.
- All guidance-related policies are in place, but the Critical Incident Management Plan was drafted in 2012. It is recommended that the plan be reviewed and updated in line with the most recent NEPS publication *Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools* (2016).

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 Drogheda Grammar School is pleased with the Inspection Report and its observations and findings.

The comments in relation to Teaching and Learning, Subject and Whole School Support and Planning and Preparation are positive and reflect well overall on the staff and school.

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the good quality teaching and learning, positive rapport between teacher and students and the wide range of assessment practices used within the department. We are also pleased that the inspector recognised and deemed as “laudable” the mentoring, prefect and student council activities that exist within the school.

The Board of Management is also encouraged to see that the provision of a full time guidance counsellor, excellent facilities and the “highly commendable collaboration between the guidance department, the special needs (SEN) co-ordinator, year heads, SPHE teachers and TY Co-ordinator” were recognised by the Inspectorate.

Finally it was pleased to see that its “very strong commitment to supporting student wellbeing” had been noted and recognised.

Overall the inspection report highlighted the strength and quality of the guidance department and the school’s commitment to the wellbeing and guidance of each and every student.

## **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, Senior Management and staff welcome the recommendations of this inspection report. We, as a whole school community, are committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning in our school and the wellbeing of our students. We value reflection on our practice and any advice given.

The school has taken immediate action to review and update the Critical Incident Management Plan (which was scheduled for review this current year) in light of the most recent NEPS draft guidelines which were issued during the period of inspection.

The guidance plan will be edited to incorporate the range of different activities currently provided and the staff involved in other roles/activities which may fall under the whole school guidance plan.

The school will also examine how best to further involve the Student Council and all students in collaboration with all those responsible for guidance and wellbeing related activities within our school.

## 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;