

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

**Subject Inspection in Guidance**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Our Lady Of Mercy Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Ozanam St. Waterford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	64971W

**Date of Inspection: 10-10-2019**



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**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 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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	09-10-2019 and 10-10-2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Meeting with members of the student support team</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 relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford is a voluntary school for girls under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The diverse cohort of students who attend the school come from inner city, urban and rural backgrounds. The school has a current enrolment of 484 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- Overall, teaching and learning was of a high quality; students were engaged in purposeful learning activities although some further opportunities to collaborate and reflect on learning were required.
- The provision of guidance on the timetable for students is very good; there is a full-time guidance counsellor very effectively leading and delivering the guidance programme.
- A highly effective student support team meets on a weekly basis to discuss individual student concerns and whole-school issues.
- Positive mental health, inclusion and wellbeing are actively promoted across the school through a range of valuable measures.
- Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education is a priority and a series of highly commendable activities are planned to promote education and careers in STEM.
- The overall quality of whole-school guidance planning and preparation is of a very high standard with many exemplary practices.

#### Recommendations

- All teachers should plan lessons to include recurrent opportunities for students to collaborate and reflect on their learning.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, teaching and learning was of a high quality; students were engaged in purposeful learning activities although some further opportunities to collaborate and reflect on learning were required.
- Relationships and interactions in all lessons were very positive which led to a co-operative and supportive learning environment. Students were observed presenting their answers with confidence, asking very good questions and contributing their opinions on topics such as learner styles, study skills, and after-school course and career options.
- Students were purposefully engaged in meaningful activities which included effective individual, pair and group activities. At times there was scope for more discussion and collaboration as students worked purposefully, but quietly and individually.
- Sixth-year students successfully demonstrated their knowledge and working together skills when they presented, as a team, their findings on learner styles linked to careers and courses. Giving students opportunities to research and present collaboratively is good practice.
- The teachers effectively planned all lessons to include clear learning intentions, key words and identified the success criteria. KWL resource sheets which identified what students knew about the topic (K), what they wanted to know (W) and what they learned (L), were used effectively to identify students' current level of knowledge and what they would like to learn. However, reflection on learning was not as effective and the KWL sheets were not used as purposefully to support reflection on learning and evaluate student progress. All teachers should plan lessons to include opportunities for students to reflect on their learning.
- Guidance assessment is good; students' work is corrected and students receive affirming and developmental feedback on their diary of work experience and career investigation assignments. It is positive to note that progress in Guidance is reported to parents of TY and senior cycle students.
- Students are provided with a useful range of psychometric assessment tests to assist them in their education decisions and career management.

### 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall provision and whole school support for guidance is very good.
- The provision of guidance on the timetable for students is very good; there is a full-time guidance counsellor very effectively leading and delivering the guidance programme.
- All senior cycle students, including the LCA students, have very good access to the guidance counsellor during a weekly guidance lesson. The guidance counsellor is timetabled to be available to facilitate effective co-teaching of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme for all junior cycle students. This is working very well and effectively supports delivery of the education and career guidance aspects of the SPHE programme.
- Senior management is very supportive of guidance in the school and the guidance counsellor's timetable is designed to provide a very good balance between classroom guidance, one-to-one support, and time for collaboration with colleagues, parents, and external agencies.

- Students have very good access to the guidance counsellor for individual appointments which are offered from first year, to discuss personal, social, educational or career issues. High numbers of students are availing of this service.
- To support the work of the guidance counsellor and learning support co-ordinator, a highly effective student support team meets on a weekly basis. The team discusses individual student concerns and whole-school or group issues leading to individual interventions to support students, as well as procedure, policy and programme development to support the wider school community. Very strong links are maintained with year heads and communication of student concerns to the wider staff is very effective.
- Positive mental health, inclusion and wellbeing are actively promoted throughout the school through a range of measures and activities including the Amber and Yellow Flag committees, student mentoring, sports, and other activities such as the *BeLonG To* support group. Second-year students participate in a stress and anxiety reduction programme which students have evaluated as helpful. Students participate in valuable anti-bullying and online-safety training programmes.
- Comprehensive induction programmes are provided for first-year and TY students at the beginning of the school year. Very good mentoring and peer support is in place. Sixth-year religious education students write individual letters of advice to first-year students to support them in making a successful transition as part of the *Moving Up* induction programme. The level of peer support is commendable.
- Guidance is a whole-school activity and many successful whole-school social-personal, education and career promotion events are organised including College Awareness, Science, Maths, Finance, Irish, and Wellbeing weeks. This year an innovative whole-school study skills week is planned to support the development of subject-specific study skills.
- STEM education is a priority and a series of highly commendable activities are planned including a Science programme whereby TY students collaborate with sixth-class pupils for six weeks. First-year students engage in a *Futurwize* programme in conjunction with a local pharmaceutical employer through the Junior Achievement programme, while fifth and sixth-year students take part in *STEM zoo* and *Spectroscope in a Suitcase* which are workshops delivered by Waterford Institute of Technology and University College Cork. In addition, female role models and other speakers from careers in STEM regularly visit the school. This is very good practice.
- The guidance counsellor is highly committed to ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) and has attended a large number of additional training events. The senior management team is very supportive and facilitates the guidance counsellor to attend guidance counselling supervision and monthly CPD.

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

- The overall quality of whole-school guidance planning and preparation is of a very high standard with many exemplary practices.
- The standard of individual guidance planning by the guidance counsellor and collaborative whole-school guidance planning are both very high. It is positive to note there is a recently formed whole-school guidance planning team comprising a small number of teachers who have volunteered to participate in this new initiative. It is commendable that this team has met a number of times, retained meeting minutes and prepared an action plan of activities to undertake, which includes policy review, expansion of the attainment tracking and monitoring system, development of an international student support pack, and promotion of whole-school study skills.
- The whole-school guidance plan contains a commendable level of detail regarding the social-personal, educational and career guidance programme. The team has used the continuum of

support model to identify if guidance activities are for all, some, or a few. In addition, they have indicated, through a colour coding system, if activities relate to developing myself, my learning, or my career path. This is exemplary practice.

- It is praiseworthy that the guidance team planning documentation provides a clear and comprehensive outline, in a month-by-month format, of all planned whole-school guidance co-curricular events. Very good links are maintained with past students who talk to students about their college experience and career paths.
- The guidance counsellor very effectively collaborates with students by seeking their views both in advance of the delivery of the programme and at the end through an evaluation process. This is very good practice.
- The guidance counsellor's record keeping practices are in line with best practice, including safe storage, retention and destruction of files and sensitive data.

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 welcomes the extremely positive and affirming guidance report. The board is particularly pleased that the report acknowledges and affirms the many effective and exemplary practices in the school and among them are:

- The very high standard of whole-school guidance planning and preparation with many exemplary practices
- The very effective leading and delivering of the guidance programme
- The highly effective student support team
- The high quality of teaching and learning
- The very good provision of guidance on the timetable
- The active promotion of positive mental health, inclusion, wellbeing and STEM across the school

### **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 notes the suggestion for improvement in the school and will encourage and support teachers to address this recommendation as soon as possible.



## 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;