

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ballybay Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ballybay County Monaghan
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	72170H

Date of Inspection: 18-11-2016



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. Learning, teaching 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.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	17 and 18 November 2016
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 two lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Ballybay Community College is a co-educational school under the patronage of Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB). It has a current enrolment of 316 students. The programmes offered are the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.
- The guidance programme is of a very high quality and demonstrates a very commendable balance between personal, educational and career guidance counselling across all year groups.
- The school has been piloting its own innovative wellbeing programme at junior cycle.
- The guidance department is dedicated and hardworking and is having a positive impact on many aspects of school life.
- The school offers a wide range of subject options to students but programme options at senior cycle are limited to the established Leaving Certificate.
- The closer tracking of students' progress in relation to ability and attainment tests is having a beneficial effect on learner outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A more integrated, collaborative and cross-curricular approach should be taken to developing the school's wellbeing programme, in line with the advice provided in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) draft *Guidelines on Wellbeing in Junior Cycle*.
- Consideration should be given to exploring the desirability of offering alternative programmes, such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), as options to senior-cycle students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of the teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. The lessons visited were well planned, structured and sequenced.
- The classrooms visited were attractive learning spaces with colourful and stimulating displays. In keeping with the school's focus on developing literacy skills, word walls of key words and subject-specific terminology have been developed.
- Active learning methodologies, including pair work and group work, were used creatively to promote collaborative learning and student engagement. It was clear that the teachers and students were at ease, facilitating styles of presentation and task-setting that were student-centred and based on positive relationships.
- Highly-effective team teaching was observed in one of the lessons visited. The teachers worked very well together; one took a leading role while the other moved around the classroom to assess students' learning and to offer support to individuals and specific groups. It was evident that considerable planning had gone into this close collaborative approach. It is commendable that the two teachers involved have established a practice of meeting regularly to review their lessons.
- In the lessons observed, learning was assessed through the use of worksheets, student interactions and the effective use of questioning strategies that promoted critical thinking. In one lesson, students debated the relative merits of a recent college open day. This proved to be a very effective learning strategy, as students were challenged on how they would apply their learning from that experience to getting the most out of their next college visit.
- Affirmation and formative verbal feedback were very evident in the classroom setting. From the sample of student folders evaluated, it was clear that students' work is being monitored and that written formative feedback of varying depth is being provided on that work.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good. The guidance programme is of a very high standard and demonstrates a very good balance between personal, educational and career guidance counselling across all year groups.
- Eleven hours have been allocated for Guidance, half of which is allocated to classroom guidance, with the remainder allocated to guidance counselling with individual students. Timetabled classes include Guidance to students in all year groups, apart from third year where a guidance module is provided.
- The guidance department is dedicated and hard working. It has been proactive in identifying common issues and problems that arise, particularly for junior-cycle students. It has put in place an innovative wellbeing programme in first year and second year to address these issues. While the programme has been quite successful to date, there is scope to implement a more cross-curricular approach to its delivery in conjunction with other subject departments, including Physical Education. It is recommended that a more integrated and cross-curricular approach be taken to developing the programme, in line with the NCCA draft *Guidelines on Wellbeing in Junior Cycle*.
- The guidance counsellor works very closely with all staff, but especially with the special educational needs coordinator and teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

It is commendable that a very successful event was organised recently to promote a greater awareness of internet safety among students, parents and staff. To build on this success, the school may like to consider organising similar events to complement the school's wellbeing programme.

- The guidance counsellor is a key member of the student-support team. The team's weekly meeting provides an effective forum to address the resolution of issues regarding individual students. Close links have been established with the Meitheal family support group, the Youth Advocacy Programme, the Foróige Big Brother/Big Sister scheme, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the National Educational Psychological Service.
- It is commendable that the school offers a very wide range of subject options to its student cohort, and subject sampling in first year assists students in their decision making. The range of programmes on offer is limited at senior cycle. It is recommended that consideration be given to exploring the desirability of offering additional programmes such as LCVP or LCA as options to senior-cycle students.
- The guidance counsellor is a member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and plays a leading role locally in organising counselling supervision and the CMETB's careers fair.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation in the guidance department are of a very good standard. The Guidance plan is comprehensive and contains very detailed schemes of work. The facilities for Guidance are excellent and the guidance office contains a wealth of resources.
- It is commendable that the guidance counsellor works closely with the senior management team to track students' progress in relation to ability and attainment tests, and to provide appropriate interventions and supports where necessary. There is statistical evidence that this is having a beneficial effect on learner outcomes.
- Record keeping in the department is of a high quality. Procedures are in place to track, on an annual basis, the initial destinations of students who have completed their Leaving Certificate. Photographs of past pupils along with details of their initial career choices are on prominent display in the school and serve to motivate students to set high expectations for themselves.

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.

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 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. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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;