

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

**Subject Inspection of Guidance**  
**REPORT**

**Coláiste Cholmcille**  
**Ballyshannon, County Donegal**  
**Roll number: 91506V**

**Date of inspection: 26 January 2016**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F**  
**O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N**  
**A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GUIDANCE**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	<b>25 &amp; 26 January 2016</b>
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellors and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellors</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of the teaching and learning evident in the lessons observed was good, with some very good practice noted.
- School management and staff are very supportive of guidance provision in the school.
- There is an integrated, effective and collaborative approach to providing Guidance and student supports at whole-school level.
- The school has recently been awarded a yellow flag as a *Health Promoting School* for its promotion of positive mental health.
- First-year students sample every subject option for the entire year.
- A tutor-mentoring programme for sixth-year students, which is facilitated by current and retired members of the teaching staff, has been successful in assisting students to achieve their full potential.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A short module in Guidance should be provided to all students in Transition Year (TY) to afford opportunities for students to complete project work in career and course investigations.
- Formal meetings of the guidance team should be held on a weekly basis and further opportunities for peer mentoring should be explored.
- The practice of providing a taster programme in all optional subjects for the entire duration of first year should be reviewed in light of the new Junior Cycle framework.
- A buddy system for first-year students should be re-established; with the mentors drawn from year groups other than sixth year.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Coláiste Cholmcille, a co-educational community school, is the only post-primary school in Ballyshannon. Enrolment stands at 652 students currently. The programmes offered are the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the established Leaving Certificate.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of the teaching and learning evident in the lessons observed was good, with some very good practice noted.
- The lessons observed were well planned, structured and sequenced. The topics chosen, which included preparation for an aptitude test and interview techniques, were timely and relevant. There was an appropriate focus on supporting relevant literacy skills, especially in the area of digital literacy.
- In all of the lessons observed, digital presentations were used to good effect to explain and reinforce concepts. Good practice was seen in lessons where the teacher paused the presentation and allowed students to reflect and engage with the topic.
- Teaching and learning were particularly effective when the right balance was achieved between teacher-led and student-led activities. For example, in some lessons, *think, pair and share* activities were used effectively to enhance students' understanding of concepts like abstract reasoning and spatial awareness. These activities concluded with well-processed plenary sessions that assessed and consolidated learning.
- Some good formative assessment practice was noted in lessons. In one lesson, for instance, students played different roles in a mock-interview situation and the teacher provided affirmation and quality formative feedback on how students could improve their performance.
- Relationships in the classroom were positive and respectful, and facilitated an easy interaction between the students and the teacher. The teachers moved easily around the classroom. This provided opportunities for ongoing assessment of individual students' progress. Teachers used effective questioning techniques at the end of each lesson to assess and consolidate learning, which is good practice.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for Guidance is very good.
- School management and staff are very supportive of guidance provision. The board of management has allocated a total of twenty-one hours to Guidance, including 9.5 hours of timetabled guidance lessons for fifth-year and sixth-year students.
- While Guidance is not timetabled for TY, the guidance counsellors provide short inputs to offer advice on work experience and subject choice. In order to enhance the provision of Guidance to this year group, it is recommended that a short module in Guidance be provided to all TY students. This module should include project work and presentations by students on career and course investigations.
- There are two guidance counsellors in the department, one of whom is new to the role, and they meet on an informal basis. It is recommended that formal meetings of the

guidance team be held on a weekly basis and that further opportunities for peer mentoring within the department be explored.

- The school has a full-time chaplain who offers mentoring, advice and support to students. Peer support is also provided by sixth-year students to all class groups during break-times.
- There is an integrated and collaborative approach to providing Guidance at whole-school level. The guidance counsellors are members of a very effective student support team and they liaise very closely with outside agencies, including the NEPS psychological service, the local Neighbourhood Youth Project, *Jigsaw* and the *Big Brother and Big Sister Project*. It is noteworthy that the school has recently been awarded a yellow flag for its promotion of positive mental health as a *Health Promoting School*.
- First-year students sample every subject option and study up to twenty subjects. This arrangement gives students an opportunity to sample subjects before making a final decision as they transfer into second year. School management regularly reviews this system and is satisfied that it has served the students well up to now. However, the current arrangements may cause subject overload for students. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed, particularly in light of the new Junior Cycle framework.
- It is positive that staff and students organise a range of activities and resources to ease the transition of pupils from primary schools. The school used to run a buddy system for first-year students but this was discontinued due to the retirement of a post holder and the re-allocation of posts. It is recommended that this buddy system be re-established and that the student mentors are drawn from other year groups apart from sixth year.
- It is commendable that a tutor-mentoring programme for sixth-year students, which is facilitated by current and retired teachers, has been successful in assisting students to achieve their full potential.
- The facilities for Guidance are very good and include two fully equipped offices.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning and preparation in the guidance department is good and includes useful guidelines published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education. The Guidance plan is well structured, but it should include the full range of student supports available at whole-school level. The schemes of work should also refer to learning outcomes and methods of assessment.
- The guidance department has played a collaborative role in the development of many school policies, including those relating to critical incident response, positive rewards and the code of behaviour. All school policies should include the date when they were approved and ratified.
- Record keeping in the department is good and procedures are in place to track on an annual basis the initial destinations of students who have completed their Leaving Certificate.

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

*Published March 2016*

# **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 the school is gratified that the high standards of provision of support for students has been recognised.

**Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

Currently the Guidance Department meet every day on an informal basis. This is proving satisfactory to the running of the Dept. A formal meeting is held at least three times annually.

The Board, in consultation with the staff, is committed to restoring the 1<sup>st</sup> Year Buddy system. This is dependent on increased staff allocation and/or a restoration of middle management posts.