

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Guidance  
REPORT**

**Christian Brothers Secondary School  
Mitchelstown, County Cork  
Roll number: 62420V**

**Date of inspection: 27 October 2011**



**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 PROVISION IN GUIDANCE**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	27 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during one class period</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and deputy principal</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The teaching and learning observed was of a high standard.
- Currently, a guidance counsellor is not employed and it is not clear how the ex-quota allocation for Guidance is being used.
- A range of guidance-related supports is provided that includes career guidance, counselling support and learning support.
- A care structure of year heads and class teachers has been established that enables communication and pastoral, administrative and disciplinary support for students and staff.
- There is evidence of collaborative practice among staff, and between the school and the community in the provision of supports for students.
- Whole-school guidance planning has been limited to the provision of career guidance and personal counselling support; however, it is clear that these areas have been well considered.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Serious consideration should be given to acquiring the services of a qualified guidance counsellor to lead the delivery of guidance in the school.
  - The use of the ex-quota allocation for Guidance should be clarified.
  - An integrative, whole-school guidance plan should be developed in the context of school development planning.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Christian Brothers Secondary School is a boys' post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). It caters for a relatively stable enrolment of 348 boys. A unit for students with disorders in the autistic spectrum has been established with funding from the Department of Education and Skills. Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) are offered as optional programmes.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The teaching and learning in the lesson observed was of a high standard. The lesson was well structured. The absence of a number of students was noted at the outset. The objectives of the lesson were clearly stated. Materials, such as a worksheet, had been prepared in advance of the lesson and were used effectively throughout.
- Relevant connections were made between students' individual experiences and proposed work experience. The importance of safety at work was skilfully drawn upon in the course of the conversation. Appropriate time was devoted to each student and all reacted positively to the opportunity to respond.
- It was clear that a good relationship existed between students and the teacher, facilitated by clear communication and a teaching style that was appropriate to the cohort. Ongoing affirmation for their mini-company and fundraising efforts was warmly received by students.
- Students were seated in a U formation that facilitated discussion and eye contact. Student thought was prompted by a variety of techniques that included brainstorming, and by the use of questions of different levels of complexity. In their responses, students' experiences of work, including voluntary care work, was extensively quoted. Good use was made of the blackboard for noting important issues as they arose. Unfamiliar terms were noted by students in notebooks without the need for additional prompting, demonstrating the benefit of regular routines in the conduct of the lesson.

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

- The ex-quota allocation for Guidance from the Department is thirteen hours per week; however, it is not clear precisely how this allocation is used by the school. A guidance counsellor is not currently employed and serious consideration should be given to acquiring the services of a qualified guidance counsellor to lead the delivery of guidance in the school.
- Elements of the guidance programme are currently delivered by members of staff. The deputy principal delivers the bulk of career guidance. Two members of staff have qualifications in counselling and provide counselling services to students identified by senior management and by staff. It is not clear that such provision is made from the school's general resources, as would be appropriate, rather than from the ex-quota allocation for Guidance.
- In addition to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), first-year students are timetabled for a weekly lesson in career guidance. These, of themselves, are laudable practices. The provision of lessons in first year, for example, ensures early consideration by students of issues leading, ultimately, to life choices and decisions. Similarly,

collaboration between the teacher of first-year students and the deputy principal ensures a balance of provision across the year groups.

- It is clear that the best interests of students are priorities for staff and management. To that end, a system of year heads and class teachers is in place that is in keeping with the mission of the school under the ERST charter to create a caring school community. Links have been established with external agencies, such as the local clergy, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and with local doctors that supplement the work of interested staff members. Referrals to these agencies are managed by the senior management team in collaboration with staff members.
- The two other post-primary schools in the town are within walking distance. This enables collaboration in the design of timetables that broaden the range of optional subjects available to students, particularly in the senior cycle. Despite the administrative difficulty involved in the process, the timetabling of optional subjects for the Leaving Certificate examination is based on the expressed preferences of students. This is good practice and is indicative of the school's support for the principle of student choice.
- Students are assigned, in first year, to classes of mixed ability. This is good practice. Diagnostic assessment of students' learning needs is carried out by the additional educational needs department. Psychometric and diagnostic testing are important elements in the identification and analysis of students' needs, and as a source of reliable evidence in school self-evaluation. It is suggested that, as part of the school plan, an assessment policy be developed that reflects current practice and refers to recent changes in test-user standards.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Although the plans observed show evidence of a structured approach to career guidance, it is not clear how the ex-quota allocation for Guidance is used. Guidance provision should be in accordance with Circular PPT12/05 and with the guidelines of the Department.
- Access to continuing professional development (CPD) is an essential component of good practice in Guidance and in school development planning. Examples of available CPD include that provided collaboratively by the Department and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) in the area of professional counselling support, that in whole-school guidance planning provided by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). It is recommended that the school engage with these processes as soon as is practicable.
- The position of the school regarding the delivery of the Guidance module of the Vocational Preparation element of the LCA programme should be clarified in the course of guidance planning. LCA resource documents advise that this module is intended for delivery by a guidance counsellor.
- It is recommended that, a small, but representative team be formed to lead whole-school guidance planning. This should be effected in the context of, and as an integral part of whole-school planning as recommended in the report of a 2009 evaluation of the school's Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). It is recommended that students' needs be analysed as a core component of this process, with the participation of the student council.

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

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.