An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT

Saint John Bosco Community College
Cahercon, Kildysart, County Clare
Roll number: 76075K

Date of inspection: 29 November 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Saint John Bosco Community College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of provision in Guidance and makes recommendations for the further development of Guidance in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms, viewed guidance facilities, interacted with students, held discussions with teachers and reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and guidance counsellor. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Saint John Bosco Community College was formed in 2002 by the amalgamation of Kildysart Vocational School and the Cahercon School, a co-educational boarding school then run by the Salesian Sisters. The school overlooks the Shannon Estuary and caters for the educational needs of a mainly rural area. Accommodation, on two storeys, is spacious and well maintained. Student enrolment, currently 211, is relatively stable, reflecting the trend in the local population. The ex-quota allocation for Guidance from the Department of Education and Skills is eleven hours per week.

The guidance department has undergone a number of staff changes since the inauguration of the school. An established staff member with previous qualifications in the area of additional educational needs has qualified recently as a guidance counsellor and has held that position in the school since September 2010. The allocation for Guidance is used fully and effectively by the guidance counsellor whose employment hours are supplemented by duties as a subject teacher. This inspection presents a timely opportunity for review and evaluation in a school in which guidance and special educational needs supports are valued.

Relationships in the school are good. Students were observed to be courteous to each other and to staff members both in classrooms and in the building generally. In addition to the guidance counsellor, the school employs a full-time chaplain. The additional educational needs department is currently co-ordinated by the guidance counsellor. In view of the importance of both of these roles and the varied responsibilities associated with them, it is recommended that the roles be assumed by separate, trained staff members. This should enable the formation of core expertise in discrete departments, namely, the guidance department, the chaplaincy and the additional educational needs department, working collaboratively in support of students. Such collaboration is already a feature of good practice in the school. Students are well supported both formally by these services, and informally by staff in general. A student-support team is well structured, having weekly, minuted meetings and comprising senior management, the guidance department and the chaplaincy.
Guidance is perceived appropriately in the school. It is clear that personal, educational and vocational guidance are practised in a programme that is balanced across the student cohort and includes collaboration with subject departments such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Religious Education (RE) that deliver elements common to the guidance programme.

The facilities for Guidance are very good. A well-appointed office is situated centrally in the building and is furnished with the requisite technological and administrative equipment. A satellite system is used to access broadband internet services. The system was observed to function satisfactorily during the inspection.

The size of the school facilitates communication on a level that is appropriately informal and includes appropriate structured processes of communication among staff, such as the student-support team meetings, already mentioned, and meetings with management, parents and students. Dáil na Scoile is the council of elected students from each year group which has effective links to staff. In addition, sixth-year students volunteer to be mentors to first years, a system that complements a parallel teacher-student mentoring system. Other supports include the Rainbows programme of peer support for students who have experienced loss and, through the Gaisce programme and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the support of students who participate in the community and in personal development.

Positive links exist between the school and external agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and referrals to such agencies are managed jointly by senior management and staff as appropriate. The parents’ council is being re-formed by senior management following the ending of the term of office of previous members. It is suggested that the re-formation of the parents’ council should be completed as an adjunct to school development planning in the light of the desirability of parents’ involvement in the process of policy development.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The guidance department plan is well formed and documented. The plan includes links to the other supports available to students through the year-head and class-teacher structure and establishes clear collaborative links to, for example, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). This is good practice and should be extended to all supports available to students, particularly in light of the recommended development of the additional educational needs department. Provision for self-evaluation and for student evaluation of the guidance programme was observed in the guidance department planning documents. This is very good practice and an important aspect of the planning process.

Some optional subjects are chosen by students prior to entry. The system of subject choice should be reviewed regularly to ensure equality of opportunity. The DVD supplied to schools by the Department of Education and Skills, *eQuality Measures* (2009), provides some useful information in this regard and should be consulted in conjunction with other literature on the matter, such as the various Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI) reports on its longitudinal study of schooling.

It is recommended that a whole-school guidance planning team be established. It is suggested that the student-support team assumes responsibility for the advancement of such planning. This team
appears to be ideally placed, being ready-made and appropriately structured, to advance whole-school guidance planning with minimum additional effort and using established school development planning procedures. The guidance department plan provides a good model on which an integrated plan for all supports might be developed. Considerable whole-school guidance planning documentation exists that should assist such school-wide development. This includes material available on the websites of the Department at www.education.gov.ie, the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) at www.sdpi.ie, the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) www.ncge.ie and Qualifax at www.qualifax.ie. In particular, the Inspectorate (2005) Guidelines for Second-Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998, Relating to Students’ Access to Appropriate Guidance provides a context in which whole-school guidance should be viewed. Similarly, A curricular framework for Guidance in post-primary education, published as a consultative document by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2007 provides a useful outline on which cross-curricular collaboration might be achieved in the delivery of the curricular element of Guidance.

It should be noted that the purpose of such planning is to ensure that students are delivered the most efficient guidance and support through collaborative and clearly documented practice. It is clear that the continuity of guidance provision has been facilitated by a consensus among staff as to the nature of Guidance and the existing formal and informal structures, such as pastoral care, to support this.

The guidance department has engaged with the community and with parents through the school’s work-experience programme and through presentations on relevant aspects of the guidance programme, such as course and subject choice. Similarly, professional contacts have been established with the local branch of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and guidance departments in other schools. A practical outcome of these contacts has been the arrangement of a regional careers fair, which students of the school attend.

The counselling role of the guidance department is under development in accordance with the 2005 Guidelines, already mentioned above. Professional counselling support is available to guidance counsellors through the local IGC branch, in collaboration with the Department. Provision should be made in the guidance plans for engagement with this support. Concomitants of the counselling role of the guidance department are the desirability of clear statements regarding the school’s referral procedures and the arrangements made to ensure confidentiality. Good practice would include policy statements relating to these issues in the school plan. Insofar as possible, such statements should apply across departments and should be reflected in subject-department plans.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The lesson observed in the course of the inspection was well structured and planned. A roll was called at the outset, materials were to hand and students were seated in the computer room. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used to good effect throughout the lesson. The lesson, on the theme of the career investigation, was introduced very effectively with a statement of objectives. Students were seated at individual workstations and quickly engaged with the tasks set for them. A career interest inventory associated with the Careers Portal website was completed by each student. The handout distributed at the outset contained clear instructions regarding the use of the instrument and its interpretation.
Students, having completed the inventory, used the results appropriately and in combination with other information provided, such as the National Framework of Qualifications and the sparing use of a textbook throughout. This is good practice, making practical use of information and building on self-review. Similar good practice was followed prior to the lesson conclusion when homework was assigned, learning outcomes were established and the lesson was summarised.

ASSESSMENT

At the time of this inspection, guidance-department assessment procedures were being devised in the context of the development of the guidance department and the additional educational needs department. The recent staff changes present a good opportunity to develop a collaborative assessment process that serves the needs of both departments and of the school, particularly in an era in which professional teaching practice is becoming a major focus of whole-school planning. Practice to date has been the assessment of students’ general ability at an early stage as a reference point for monitoring students’ academic progress and in the identification of those for whom additional diagnostic assessment may be appropriate. Current proposals include the use of a recently standardised assessment of general ability and of an aptitude test for students in the course of programme and subject decision making.

Record keeping is of a high standard and includes the documentation of the guidance department plan. Good use is made of ICT in the maintenance of records and general guidance planning and organisation, such as the tracking of students’ initial destinations having left the school. The school operates a notable awards system whereby weekly postcards are sent to parents noting successes in attendance, homework, general effort and participation in extracurricular activities.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

• Students are well supported.
• Guidance is perceived appropriately in the school.
• The facilities for Guidance are very good.
• Positive links exist between the school and external agencies.
• The guidance department plan is well formed and documented.
• The guidance department has engaged with the community and with parents.
• A good relationship has been established between the guidance department and management.
• Record keeping is of a high standard.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

• Responsibility for the co-ordination of the guidance department and the additional educational needs department should be assigned to separate, trained staff members.
• A whole-school guidance planning team should be established.
• The system of subject choice should be reviewed regularly to ensure equality of opportunity for all students.
Post-evaluation meetings were held with the guidance counsellor and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The staff and Principal found the inspection and subsequent report a very positive experience. They have learned and are enthusiastic to implement its recommendations.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The school is encouraging a teacher to consider taking the Special Needs Diploma in “Mary Immaculate” College, Limerick.
A planning team is being put in place in the school.