An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT

Regina Mundi College
Douglas Road, Cork
Roll number: 62691G

Date of inspection: 30 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during one class period</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lesson observed was very good.
- It is not clear how the full ex-quota allocation for Guidance is used in the delivery of the guidance programme.
- The development of policies and procedures with implications for guidance department practice has been rapid in recent years.
- The technological infrastructure for Guidance is good and is in the process of further development.
- Informal and formal communication is ongoing among staff in an ethos supportive of students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The use of the ex-quota allocation for Guidance should be clearly outlined in guidance plans.
- Consideration should be given to the use of a standardised test of general ability with current norms.
- The guidance plan should include the timetabling of provision for participation in continuing professional development (CPD).
INTRODUCTION
Regina Mundi College is a voluntary secondary girls’ school. Enrolment, at the time of the inspection, had grown to 420 with the concomitant development of infrastructure such as science laboratories and kitchens. The Transition Year (TY) is compulsory for all students. An ethos that is supportive of students pervades the school, both in its aims and in its practice.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- The lesson observed was well planned and executed. The objectives were clearly outlined, directions were lucid and students’ learning was confirmed regularly through questions and observation of work in progress. Previous learning was reinforced through repetition and questioning, and reference was made to the content of subsequent lessons, providing an effective mental structure for the lesson.
- Students remained focused on the material presented throughout the lesson and participated well in the learning process. Good relationships enabled the presentation of the lesson in a calm atmosphere that facilitated the exchange of views through discussion and the response of students to prompts and questions.
- The material was presented with enthusiasm and was relevant to the guidance programme and to students’ level of competency. Comprehensive knowledge of the topic and familiarity with the available resources enabled a presentation that was effective despite a minor technical difficulty that was overcome quickly and skilfully. It is suggested that, in classes of mixed ability, and, specifically, where courses of further study are being perused, students should be encouraged to consider courses at all levels of qualification.
- It was clear that students were familiar with the school’s information and communication technology (ICT) system and needed no introduction to its operation. The lesson progressed in this context and no reference to technical issues among students was needed. This is good practice in guidance lessons that often rely heavily on access to online resources.
- Students’ attention was directed initially to a glossary of terms used on the website. Subsequently, where clarification was sought, explanations were provided that added to students’ vocabulary and to their understanding of the material.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
- The ex-quota allocation for Guidance in this school from the Department of Education and Skills is seventeen hours per week. It is not clear how the ex-quota allocation is fully used for Guidance. This should be addressed and clarified in the guidance department plan and, by extension in the appropriate component of the whole school plan.
- Students engage in a range of activities related to personal, educational and vocational guidance. Many of these activities are managed collaboratively by staff across the range of subject departments. Much of the curricular component of Guidance in the junior cycle is delivered, for example, by staff involved in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). This is good practice and should be noted in planning documents.
- Collaboration between the guidance department and the additional educational needs department is effective and largely informal. It is suggested that, in the context of a growing school, such collaboration be formalised and noted.
• Current timetabling does not facilitate the participation of the guidance department in CPD organised by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC). The guidance plan should include provision for such participation.

• Most of the assessment of students new to the school is carried out by the additional educational needs department. The psychometric instrument used in the assessment of general ability is somewhat dated. Consideration should be given to the use of a test with associated norms appropriate to the current cohort of students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• It is clear that the school has engaged productively in self-evaluation and review. Much progress has been made in recent years in the development of plans and procedures related to Guidance. These include the establishment of a crisis response team, a structure of year heads and class teachers and policy formation regarding, for example, substance use, child protection, admission and inclusion. In addition to the commitment of staff to improvement, engagement with external agencies, such as the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE), has been a source of advice and support.

• Communication structures associated with these initiatives continue to be developed in tandem with policy development. Having grown from an enrolment of approximately 250 students, much communication is appropriately informal, although regular meetings of staff with middle-management responsibilities have been instituted. In this context, it is recommended that, to facilitate communication, consideration should be given to the inclusion of staff with student-support responsibilities, such as the guidance counsellor, in these formal meetings.

• The development of structures and policies has been accompanied by a clear commitment to their documentation. This is good practice. The growth in student enrolment has added to the complexity of the roles of the guidance department and of other staff with student-support responsibilities. Whole-school guidance planning is the appropriate vehicle by which these developing roles and responsibilities may be clarified and documented. The guidance department, with the support of staff, has engaged with the modular whole-school guidance-planning course organised by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). The continuation of this process is encouraged.

• Among the current planning priorities of senior management is investment in ICT. It is envisaged that all classrooms will have a data projector by autumn 2011. This should facilitate the presentation of Guidance material to students throughout the school.

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

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.

Published, March 2012
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The Board of Directors of Regina Mundi College would like to thank the Inspector who carried out the subject Inspection of Guidance for the professional and courteous manner in which the inspection was carried out.

The Board of Directors welcomes this very positive and affirming report and is pleased that the findings clearly identified the following:

- A Caring ethos that is supportive of students pervades the school.
- The very positive and affirming relationship between teacher and students underpinned by mutual respect. In line with best practice, this relationship enables learning to optimum level.
- The excellent collaborative working relations and effective communication among staff.
- The school has a clear commitment to the integration of ICT into teaching and learning.
- The school also has a firm commitment to reflective practice, on-going review and self evaluation.

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

- Although there is no longer an ex-quota allocation for Guidance, due to Government budgetary cut-backs, the school is committed to the provision of Guidance and Counselling for its students – there is a commitment to outlining this in the Guidance Plan.

- Re psychometric instrument in the assessment of general ability – AH2/3 Tests have been discontinued since 2009, two years prior to the inspection. Since 2010 CATS 3 Level D Tests have been used. Irish norms became available in autumn 2011 and are being applied to 2012 Entry Assessments. Regina Mundi College has also purchased the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test. Specifically designed to quickly test levels of ability for RACE Applications.