

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT**

**Mount Temple Comprehensive School
Malahide Road, Dublin 3
Roll number: 81002K**

Date of inspection: 20 October 2009



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mount Temple Comprehensive School, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of provision of Guidance and makes recommendations for the further development of Guidance in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector interacted with students, held discussions with the principal, the deputy principal and the guidance counsellors and reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, the deputy principal and to the guidance counsellors.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mount Temple Comprehensive School has a current student enrolment of 849, comprising 482 males and 367 females. Its feeder schools are located throughout the north of the city and cover a wide geographical area. The students come from mixed socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Guidance is considered an important element of education in the school. The schools aims to provide all students with a guidance programme which meets their specific needs and aspirations.

The guidance counsellors work closely with the special educational needs (SEN) and learning support co-ordinators to ensure that all students with special educational needs receive appropriate guidance. This is good practice. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) has been introduced on a pilot basis to meet the needs of those students who may wish to follow a more practical senior-cycle programme. One of the guidance counsellors is the co-ordinator of the LCA and delivers the guidance module which is a mandatory element of the programme. It is recommended that the outcomes of the pilot should be evaluated thoroughly to determine whether it might be provided on a permanent basis.

Mount Temple Comprehensive School receives thirty-six ex-quota hours per week for Guidance from the Department of Education and Skills. All of these hours are allocated appropriately. Two qualified guidance counsellors deliver the guidance programme. The guidance counsellors are core members of the care team. The other members of the care team include the deputy principal, the chaplain, the learning support co-ordinator and the dean of discipline. The care team meets weekly and year heads attend meetings on a rotating basis. Minutes of the meetings are taken and they record the actions to be taken, and by whom, for each student discussed. This approach to supporting students is good practice.

Guidance is timetabled for fifth-year students but all year groups are provided with a module of Guidance which is delivered by arrangement with other teachers. There is limited access to information and communications technology (ICT) as there is only one ICT room in the school.

The importance of access by students to ICT for guidance purposes was discussed during the evaluation and it was agreed that, by providing flexibility around the delivery of the guidance modules, classes could be conducted in the ICT room as appropriate. It was also agreed that the guidance module for second-year students should be extended. Overall, there should be greater balance in the provision of guidance at junior and senior cycle levels.

Personal counselling is available to all students who require it or who seek an interview with either of the guidance counsellors. Students are referred for counselling through the care team, or by year heads and subject teachers. Students may also self-refer and many do so. Both guidance counsellors see a large number of students for individual counselling and the range of problems presented is wide. As far as possible, teachers who wish to refer a student to a guidance counsellor should do so through the year head. The guidance counsellors undertake short-term counselling and refer students on to outside agencies if more long term or specialised counselling is deemed necessary. Waiting lists for some of the services can be long and the guidance counsellors often find that they have to continue to see students for longer than they would wish. One of the guidance counsellors undertakes group counselling as appropriate. This involves taking a group of up to eight students to deal with specific issues or to assist students in becoming more motivated in school. This is praiseworthy.

Facilities for Guidance are reasonably good. Each guidance counsellor has an office which is equipped with a telephone and computer with internet access. There is secure storage and shelving in each office. There is a careers library and a careers section in the school library and there is a display board for guidance-related notices outside of the careers library. However, there is no dedicated classroom for Guidance and no budget allocated to Guidance. It is recommended that, in allocating rooms in the planned extension to the school, a dedicated classroom for Guidance should be provided. A small number of computers should be installed in the classroom to facilitate access by students to ICT during guidance classes when required.

There is a formal link between the guidance counsellors and the deputy principal through the care team but there are no other formal links with the principal. It is recommended that formal meetings take place between the guidance counsellors and the principal and deputy principal. There is currently a lack of clarity around some issues, for example, whether the guidance plan and some policies have been ratified by the board of management. These and other guidance-related issues should be discussed formally by management and guidance counsellors and records of decisions taken should be maintained.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Formal guidance planning commenced in Mount Temple Comprehensive School in 2006 with the establishment of a planning team. The team met formally on a weekly basis. A review of the guidance programme was undertaken through the issuing of questionnaires to staff, representatives of students and to parents. Having completed an analysis of the questionnaire responses, the team consulted relevant documentation and guidelines to assist it in developing the school guidance programme. This was a very good approach. The plan which is well structured and detailed is exemplary in terms of how a guidance plan might be developed and produced. Having completed the major elements of the guidance plan, the members of the planning team formed a newly-established care team in 2008. The team has planned to review the guidance plan and it is intended to put the guidance programme on the school's website. This is a very effective way of informing parents, prospective parents, members of staff and relevant members of the

public of the role of Guidance in the school. It is recommended that representatives of students, parents, the local business community and relevant external support services should be co-opted onto the planning team when the guidance programme is being reviewed.

There is an induction programme for incoming first-year students which includes the administration of a battery of tests. The role of the guidance counsellors is explained to first-year students in September. The guidance counsellors give a talk to the parents of first years about subject choice and during this talk parents are referred to the Qualifax module on the importance of subject choice (www.qualifax.ie). In regular lessons, first-year students are provided with information and assistance in relation to their subject choices for the Junior Certificate. All first-year students sample the optional subjects available before making choices. In principle, this is good practice.

Currently, guidance for second-year students is delivered through the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme and covers mainly issues around personal development. A module which assists students to identify their personal strengths, learning styles and interests was discussed with the guidance counsellors. The module, available on a DVD entitled *eQuality Measures* which was circulated to schools in November 2009, also introduces second-year students to the use of ICT to carry out a career investigation. The levels which students take specific subjects for the Junior Certificate are decided by individual subject teachers. It is recommended that the guidance counsellors liaise with subject teachers concerning the advice they give to students in relation to this issue. It is important that students and their parents are aware of the long term implications of taking subjects at particular levels for the Junior Certificate.

Third-year students attend a study skills seminar delivered by an outside agency. A guidance counsellor, who is also the co-ordinator of SPHE covers issues such as stress, managing time and a review of study skills as part of the SPHE programme. This is an effective approach to the delivery of the overlapping elements of Guidance and SPHE.

Almost all students take the Transition Year (TY) programme. There is a major focus on subject choice for the Leaving Certificate in TY. Subject teachers provide talks on the syllabus content of their respective subjects. Students are introduced to the Central Application Office (CAO) system and are provided with information about further education and training courses. They are prepared for work experience and are encouraged to find their own work placement. However, if necessary, the school can assist as it has a database of employers who can provide placements. To enhance students' life skills, the school could consider introducing the *Be Real Game* into the TY guidance programme. The Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) are administered and individual feedback is provided. Overall, the TY guidance programme is appropriate and relevant.

Each fifth-year class is provided with a module in Guidance, which is timetabled. The module includes an introduction to websites such as Qualifax and CareersPortal. Worksheets are provided to assist students in accessing information about courses and other relevant information. Students who are taking the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) undertake the Link Modules which form an integral part of that programme. There is a programme of open days and college visits and outside speakers are invited to give talks on specific careers during a lunchtime programme. A careers evening is organised annually by the guidance counsellors for fifth-year and sixth-year students. Students are surveyed to ascertain what careers they would like to have included in the event. The parents' committee, past students and employers support the event and representatives from third level colleges, colleges of further education, FÁS and Fáilte Ireland attend. It is recommended that students should be introduced to ICT in junior cycle and that they

should have access to relevant websites during TY. Overall, the fifth-year programme is well-planned and balanced. The provision of a careers evening is particularly appropriate.

All sixth-year students are met individually for educational and career guidance. They are provided with an information pack which includes a calendar of college open days and career events, a list of potential points and other entry requirements for courses, policies and procedures around open days, website addresses and other sources of information. Preparation sheets which students complete before attending such events are included in the pack. This is good practice as it ensures that students gain maximum benefit from their attendance at the events or open days. Sixth-year students attend the lunchtime speakers' programme. An information pack for parents is also prepared. Classes are provided to revise the CAO application procedure and for students who require it, there is a talk on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). A guidance counsellor assists the year heads in the preparation of the required references for those students who apply through the UCAS for courses in the United Kingdom. The guidance counsellors liaise with the SEN department and assist students who may be eligible to participate in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Access programme. The guidance programme for sixth-year students is comprehensive and relevant.

The school has well established links with third-level institutions, colleges of further education and training and Youthreach. It has, through its links with businesses, built up an extensive database of employers and businesses who can offer students work placements and contribute to career events in the school. All of this enhances the service provided to students.

The guidance counsellors are facilitated to attend continuing professional development (CPD) events. One of the guidance counsellors attends the programme of counselling supervision which is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Discussions have taken place about members of the care team undertaking training for the delivery of the Rainbows programme. It is recommended that the programme should be offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A fifth-year guidance class was visited during the inspection and a lesson was observed. The lesson was held in the ICT room and it was one of a module of thirteen guidance lessons timetabled for fifth-year students. The class was very large and the students were of mixed ability with different levels of ICT skills. A worksheet was distributed to students which detailed the procedure for accessing the Qualifax website. Students were required to undertake a number of activities leading to a search for third-level degree courses and to complete questions related to their search on the worksheet. The guidance counsellor used a data projector to demonstrate the procedure and as appropriate, circulated to assist individual students.

Some of the students were familiar with the website and worked independently on the task while others had some difficulties following the instructions on the worksheet. These students were assisted by the guidance counsellor. The level of interest in the lesson was mixed; some students were very focused while others lacked motivation. It is recommended that in future lessons of this type, group work should be undertaken. The students who require additional support could be taken as a group while the other students are allocated tasks such as those set out in the worksheet. After a longer and more detailed introduction to the lesson, the students taken as a group could spend some time undertaking interest tests to motivate them and then they could search and discuss courses particularly relevant to them.

ASSESSMENT

The following tests are administered to the incoming first-year students: the Non-Reading Intelligence Tests (NRIT) Level 3, Group Reading Test, Graded Arithmetic-Mathematics Test (Vernon and Miller). The DATs are administered to TY students. A range of interests inventories are undertaken by senior cycle students.

Files are maintained on all students who meet with the guidance counsellors and details of all such meetings are recorded. The records are stored in a secure manner.

Surveys of the destination of past students are carried out periodically. Questionnaires have been developed to be completed and the parents' committee assists in sending out the questionnaires. The analysis of the previous surveys is included in the planning documentation. This is all good practice. It is recommended that the assistance of the parents' committee should be sought to conduct the survey on an annual basis.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Mount Temple Comprehensive School is committed to the provision of Guidance for all of its students.
- All of the ex-quota hours provided by the Department for Guidance are used for that purpose.
- Two qualified guidance counsellors deliver the guidance programme.
- The guidance planning process was systematic and inclusive and it has led to the production of well-structured and detailed guidance plan and supporting documentation.
- The school has well established links with a wide range of support services, third-level institutions, colleges of further education and training.
- An extensive database of employers and businesses has been developed by the school.
- The school organises an annual careers evening for fifth-year and sixth-year students and involves parents in the organisation of the event.
- The guidance counsellors work in close co-operation in the planning and delivery of the guidance programme.
- The guidance counsellors are core members of the care team.
- The guidance counsellors work closely with the SEN and learning support co-ordinators in planning and delivering Guidance to students with special educational needs.

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

- Formal links by way of regular meetings between the guidance counsellors and the principal should be established.
- The guidance plan and other policies developed should be ratified by the board of management.

- There should be greater balance in the provision of guidance at junior and senior cycle levels.
- There should be earlier and greater access by students to ICT for guidance purposes.
- A dedicated classroom for Guidance should be provided in the new planned extension to the school. A number of computers should be installed in the room.
- Representatives of parents, students, the business community and relevant external support services should be co-opted onto the guidance planning team when the plan is being reviewed.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the guidance counsellors and with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.