REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Christ King Girls’ Secondary School. 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 two days 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 counsellors. 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

Christ King Girls’ Secondary School is a Catholic school in the trust of Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school is situated in Cork City and caters for students mainly from the southern areas of the city and surrounding county. Enrolment has grown to 1036 students. The school is inclusive. Its mission “to respect the uniqueness of each person within the school community” is well rooted in practice. Structures and processes are clearly designed with the support of students in view. These include the guidance service and programme, and the pastoral-care structure of year tutors and class teachers. The Meitheal group of senior students exemplifies students’ involvement in the support structures.

The current ex-quota allocation by the Department of Education for Guidance is now forty-seven hours per week in accordance with Circular PPT12/05. Following the retirement of the two previous incumbents, two guidance counsellors have joined the staff since 2008 when the ex-quota allocation for Guidance was thirty-eight hours per week. Because the guidance counsellors are timetabled for a total of nine hours and fifteen minutes for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Religious Education (RE), it is unclear as to how the remaining twelve hours and fifteen minutes of the ex-quota allocation for Guidance are being utilised. It is recommended that the full ex-quota allocation be used for Guidance. It is also recommended that this resource be noted and accounted for in guidance planning documents given the comprehensive nature of the programme and service being delivered by the guidance department in collaboration with other staff.

Collaboration among staff in support of students is clearly evident not only in the documentation of the guidance department, but also in the mutual respect of staff and students observed in the course of the inspection. Guidance documents show clear links to most aspects of the school. These include links with senior management, through the various teams operating such as the care
team and the middle-management team, and collaborative practice between the guidance department and the special educational needs department in, for example, dealing with the arrangement of reasonable accommodations in the certificate examinations. The care team meets weekly and includes guidance counsellors, senior management, the special educational needs co-ordinator and a teacher with an interest in supports for students who have experienced loss. The guidance counsellors also participate in the weekly meetings of year tutors, one at junior level and one at senior level. Attendance at these meetings is of significant benefit to effective communication. A retired member of the guidance team acts in a voluntary capacity as liaison between the school and parents. This valuable resource enhances the guidance programme by providing a direct link between parents and the school and, through the effective communication system, the guidance department. Among the many other instances of guidance department participation in the school’s systems are a friendship week designed to counter bullying and regular meetings related to SPHE and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). It is of particular note that the procedures for dealing with critical incidents have been revised recently and include exemplary provision for a combined response by the school and the three other post-primary schools in the area.

The role of students is well developed. Students continue to make substantial contributions not only to the day-to-day maintenance and decoration of the school but also to the review and development of policies and practices, and to the support of fellow students. Examples include the support provided to second-year students by the Meitheal team of trained student leaders and the support provided by members of the student council to first-year students. Proposals currently under consideration include the participation of members of the student council in an introductory day for incoming first-year students being arranged for June.

The facilities for Guidance are very good and include offices for each guidance counsellor that are appropriately located, suited to the practice of counselling and equipped with the requisite information and office technology. A guidance room is also allocated for guidance department use and includes a number of computer workstations and an interactive whiteboard among other equipment. Broadband internet access is available throughout the building and guidance lessons are generally timetabled for one of the two information and communication technology (ICT) rooms. This is good practice and facilitates guidance provision that is well balanced between work with individuals, with groups of students and with class groups across the range of year cohorts.

A standard referral system utilising appointment slips and teachers’ permission is operated by the guidance department. Referrals to external agencies are administered in collaboration with senior management and the special educational needs department as appropriate.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Guidance department planning is comprehensive and very well documented. The school’s mission heads most of the policy and planning documents seen in the course of the inspection. This is good practice, making ostensible what is lived in practice. The guidance department plan includes the programme for each year group. Of particular note is the inclusion of a section in the written plan entitled *Future priorities for (guidance) programme planning*. It is clear that self-review is an ongoing element of guidance department planning and that this facilitates collaboration with senior management in discussing and implementing short-term and long-term plans. It is of note that the process of self-review includes students’ evaluation of the guidance
programme. It is also clear that collaboration with other departments enhances the delivery of Guidance on a whole-school basis through the links that have been established and noted in the guidance department plan. The school has reached the stage of planning in which learning and teaching have become the focus of planning activity. In view of this and because of the high quality of Guidance, care and support evident throughout the school, the supports available to students should be given some prominence in subject department plans to highlight their importance in effective learning and teaching. These supports include the subject department supports and the professional supports offered by the school through, for example the guidance department, the special educational needs department and the RE department.

A meeting of the care team, attended during the inspection, demonstrated the close relationship between practice and good planning. Although the focus of the meeting was on individual needs of students, a substantial core of planning to meet those needs permeated the meeting. Examples included planning for a bonding day in August for new first-year students and consideration of the formation of a class of students who might study Mathematics at foundation level. This is good practice.

The school has responded positively to the recommendations of a whole-school evaluation in relation to Guidance such that the results are of mutual benefit to the school, to the guidance department and to students. In particular, the inclusion of the student voice in the development and review of policies such as those regarding SPHE, bullying and substance use, and in the review of the guidance programme are significant advances. Similarly positive is the immediate response to a suggestion made in the course of this inspection that the term Guidance or, in its Irish version, Treoir, should be substituted where appropriate in references to career guidance in, for example, the school’s website, documents and signs. These terms more aptly and accurately reflect the school’s well-balanced provision of personal, educational and vocational guidance.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is encouraged and facilitated by management. Both guidance counsellors are members of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and participate in the regular CPD events organised by the IGC. These include events associated with monthly meetings of the Institute, with professional support for counselling and with training in the use of psychometric instruments. In addition the guidance department participates in seminars and workshops and in delivering presentations to staff and parents on topics relevant to Guidance.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The two lessons observed in the course of the inspection revealed learning and teaching of high quality. The planning of guidance lessons is rooted in the guidance department plan, which outlines the guidance programme content for each year group and proposes the rooms to be used in timetabling lessons. The inclusion of the aims and objectives of the guidance programme for each year group is good practice. In both lessons, materials such as handouts had been prepared in advance, students were in possession of portfolios of their work to date and activities had been
planned that were both a culmination of the work of previous lessons and an additional means of engaging students. The lessons were well structured, beginning with a roll call and an introduction, and culminating in a review of the content and a preview of the content of subsequent lessons.

The rooms were appropriate to the methods used during the lessons. In both cases, ICT was used faultlessly and appropriately. In one lesson, the potential of the technology was fully used and integrated in the lesson. Here, the potential of ICT as a learning tool was ably demonstrated by enabling immediate access to information as the need arose during the lesson and by providing a platform from which the content of the lesson could be presented in an engaging manner. This is very good practice.

Both lessons were focused on the career investigation that had been an ongoing element of the guidance programme for the two Transition Year (TY) groups visited, and was linked to students’ work-experience. The methods employed included group discussion, students’ presentations, brainstorming and questioning. Their versatile use was well managed and engaging. Interactions during the lessons were cordial and were based on well-established positive relationships. Good use was made of humour throughout and it was clear from the work and responses of students that the manner of presentation had a positive effect on learning. Skilled use was made of questions that were very well suited to the student cohort. It was clear from students’ responses that prior learning had been substantial. Skilfully asked factual, higher-order and reflective questions were considered and answered clearly in that context. The active participation of students was demonstrated in one lesson by a series of questions, devised by students themselves to be put to those presenting the results of their career investigations. In another lesson, the response to a question included immediate and effective reference to web-based information. Each contribution added to the efficacy of the lessons and maintained students’ engagement throughout.

ASSESSMENT

Procedures in place for the psychometric assessment of students are a further indication of good collaborative practice in Christ King Secondary School. Collaboration between the guidance department and the special educational needs department ensures that the particular expertise of each department is used efficiently and that staff in general participate in the process and receive appropriate feedback. The results of tests administered are shared and discussed within the limits of confidentiality and are used to screen incoming students for general ability, literacy and numeracy. The main responsibility for the assessment of general ability rests with the guidance department while literacy and numeracy are assessed by the special educational needs department prior to further diagnostic assessments of students whose results indicate additional needs. Assessments are carried out in consultation with the staff of feeder primary schools and with parents. Members of the guidance team visit the main feeder schools to confirm the results of the psychometric assessments and to gather information of use in providing for the needs of new students.

A range of questionnaires and inventories are used by the guidance department, especially in the context of guidance lessons for senior cycle classes. These include web-based instruments such as those associated with the Qualifax and Careers Portal websites and it is noted that students are familiar with those websites. The maintenance of records regarding these assessments and of the other activities of the guidance department, including the minutes of meetings, records of
interviews with students and of the initial destinations of students after the Leaving Certificate examination are of a very high quality.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Guidance provision is of a high standard.
- Collaboration among staff with student-support responsibilities is ongoing and substantial.
- The guidance programme is well balanced across the range of year groups.
- An effective balance is being achieved between personal, educational and vocational guidance.
- Structures are in place that facilitate effective communication in Guidance.
- Guidance processes and plans are very well documented.
- Self-review is a significant element of guidance planning and includes the views of students and parents.

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

- The full ex-quota allocation should be used for Guidance in accordance with Circular PPT12/05.
- Guidance planning should account for the full use of the ex-quota allocation.

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

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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 Management wishes to commend the inspectorate on a very thorough evaluation of Guidance provision in Christ King Girls’ Secondary School. The Board is extremely pleased to welcome this very positive report which comprehensively recognises the high quality and well balanced provision of personal, educational and vocational guidance being delivered by the Guidance Department in collaboration with other staff.

The report acknowledges the caring atmosphere and the strength of relationships in our school. The report also acknowledges that this caring environment stems from the Presentation ethos of our school.

The report also acknowledges the high quality of teaching and learning that occurs in the Guidance classes. The report also acknowledges that quality teaching and learning is the focus of Guidance planning.

We thank the inspector for his professionalism and courtesy throughout.

The Board of Management is particularly pleased that the findings clearly identified:

- The Mission Statement of the school heads the policy and planning documents.
- The high standard of Guidance provision.
- The collaboration among staff in support of students.
- The value of the various teams, particularly the Care Team.
- The efficiency of the referral system both in house and external.
- The wide selection of student supports i.e. the student council and Meitheal team.
- The high standard of teaching and learning in the Guidance classes.
- The input of students and parents in self review and evaluation of the Guidance Programmes.
- Collaboration between the Guidance Department and the Special Educational Needs Department.
- Effective communication structures.
- The excellent I.C.T facilities in the Guidance Room.

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

- Ongoing review of the Guidance provision in the school.
- Review of staffing allocation for Guidance and how best to deliver this that best meets the needs of our student co-hort.
- Ongoing review, in consultation with all the stakeholders, of the Whole School Guidance Policy.