

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Guidance  
REPORT  
Rice College Westport  
County Mayo**

**Roll number: 647000**

**Date of inspection: 18 November 2009**



**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  
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**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Rice College, Westport, County Mayo, 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 one day during which the inspector interacted with students, held discussions with the principal, the guidance counsellor and the counsellor/chaplain and reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Rice College is a boys' school with a current enrolment of 503 students. Boys come to the school from approximately 25 feeder schools which are located in a wide geographical area, including three islands. The socio-economic backgrounds of the students are mixed. The school has an open admissions policy and it caters for students with all levels of academic ability. There is a special unit in the school to cater for students with general learning disabilities and students with other special educational needs also receive appropriate educational support. Almost 70 percent of the students go on to third-level education.

Guidance is considered by management to be central to the education of students in Rice College. It is seen as a whole school activity which contributes to the holistic development of all students and which provides appropriate supports for students throughout their second-level schooling. The current guidance counsellor came to the school in 2008 following the retirement of the previous incumbent.

The school receives seventeen ex-quota hours per week from the Department of Education and Skills for Guidance. All of these hours are allocated to the guidance counsellor for the delivery of the guidance programme. The guidance counsellor also teaches Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to one of the first-year classes. The school is in receipt of an additional 22 hours for chaplaincy. The chaplain appointed to this position works in close co-operation with the guidance counsellor in providing counselling support to students, as required. The guidance counsellor also works closely with the SPHE teachers and with the coordinators of learning support and special needs, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A guidance/care team has been established which comprises the guidance counsellor, chaplain, principal, deputy principal and the special-needs and learning-support coordinator. Other relevant members of staff attend meetings by invitation. Formal meetings of the guidance/care team are held on a regular basis and minutes of the meetings are recorded. All issues related to the guidance programme and student support are dealt with at these meetings. It is recommended that the care team should be separate from the guidance team. The care team, which should include year heads in addition to the members of the

existing guidance team, should deal with individual cases or groups and should discuss and plan the supports required in each case. The guidance team should deal with the planning and monitoring of all issues related to the whole guidance programme.

Guidance classes are timetabled for all students in second year and in all subsequent years. There is good balance between the delivery of the guidance programme to classes and one-to-one counselling and also between the provision of guidance to junior and senior cycle students. This is commended as good practice. The chaplain undertakes individual and group counselling mainly.

Facilities for guidance are reasonable and have been upgraded recently. The guidance counsellor has an office which is equipped with a computer, broadband, telephone, and has secure storage. There is no dedicated classroom for Guidance however, and it is recommended that consideration be given to the provision of one. The guidance counsellor uses varied methodologies in the delivery of lessons and this necessitates rearranging the desks in the classrooms used before and after guidance classes. This leaves less time for the delivery of the planned lessons. It also means that relevant guidance materials cannot be easily stored and that work completed by students cannot be displayed. Students have good access to ICT for guidance purposes. As required, guidance classes are held in the ICT room. This is good practice.

There are both formal and informal links between the guidance counsellor and management. The principal is a member of the guidance team, which meets formally and the guidance counsellor consults with the principal on all matters related to guidance issues on an ongoing basis.

Students are referred to the guidance counsellor by teachers, year heads, management and parents. Students may also self refer. It is recommended that a formal referral procedure be established. This can be linked to the care team. Referrals from teachers should be made through the year heads and discussed in the first instance by the care team. The care team should assess a student's needs and decide on the appropriate supports required. This may require a referral to the guidance counsellor or the chaplain or the situation may be dealt with by the year head in co-operation with the class advisor. In certain cases or if a student self refers these procedures need not apply.

As required referrals to outside support services are made through the principal. Students are referred mainly to the psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and to the Health Service Executive (HSE) Adolescent Psychological Service. A list of the names and telephone numbers of relevant professionals who provide support services was drawn up as part of the Westport Community Response Plan. The guidance counsellor attends case conferences of students who are attending the HSE clinic and is usually accompanied by another teacher. The school has been well supported by NEPS and by the HSE after recent tragedies. The school does not have a critical incident response policy in place. The guidance team is working on a draft and it is recommended that this should be discussed with all members of staff, finalised and presented to the board of management for ratification as a matter of priority. The documents prepared by NEPS *Responding to Critical Incidents-Guidelines for Schools* and *Responding to Critical Incidents-Resource Materials for Schools* should be used as references when developing the policy. The documents are available on the Department's web site [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) under NEPS.

## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Guidance planning commenced in Rice College in 2008 and a lot of work has been undertaken in the planning process. The work undertaken to date is commended. Much of this work was carried out by the guidance counsellor and the principal. A separate career-guidance and educational-guidance policy and a counselling policy have been presented and ratified by the board of management. As counselling is an integral part of Guidance it is recommended that the two policies should be merged into one policy document covering all the elements of Guidance.

The planning team has now been established and this is good. It is recommended that representatives of the students, parents and the local community be co-opted onto the planning team. A consultation process was carried out as an initial activity and the views of staff, parents and students were sought in relation to what they considered to be essential elements of the guidance programme. The consultation with students was carried out by way of focus group meetings with senior cycle students. The views of the students who participated in the focus group meetings were similar to those found in the responses by students in questionnaires they completed in the course of the inspections which are described in the Inspectorate's document *Looking at Guidance*. An analysis of the students' responses is included in the document which is available on the Department's web site [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). It is recommended that this document be consulted by the planning team.

In developing the guidance plan further the following additional resources are recommended: *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance* published by the Inspectorate of the Department; *Planning the School Guidance Programme* published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE); the guidance planning template which was prepared by the Department and is available on its web site. The template sets out the steps which the team might follow in the planning process. The revised definition of Guidance which is included in the Inspectorate's guidelines should be used as it reflects the changing focus of the objectives of Guidance which is to assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. All supporting documentation and reference material should be maintained in a separate folder to the plan. As part of the ongoing evaluation of the plan, a questionnaire for students and one for parents and other stakeholders might be developed and circulated by members of the planning team at intervals decided by the team. The plan should also make it clear what aspects of the guidance programme are in operation already and what are still in the planning stage.

Guidance programmes have been developed for all year groups in Rice College and this is good practice. The guidance counsellor accompanies the principal to the feeder primary schools in January preceding their entry to the school and is involved in the activities organised for sixth-class pupils as well as for their parents. The incoming students sample optional subjects during an open day and they have an opportunity to explore Rice College and to ask any question which they may have about it. A PowerPoint presentation on the guidance service and the role of the guidance counsellor is made on an open night for the parents of incoming first-year students. The presentation is comprehensive and provides important information for parents, particularly about the implications of subject choice and the level at which certain subjects are taken. Parents are referred to the *Subject Requirements* module on [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie). The guidance counsellor accompanies the principal to the primary schools to explain the programmes on offer in the school and to discuss with the primary school teachers the requirements of students who have special educational needs.

First-year students receive support to assist them in their transition from primary to post-primary school. Students sample optional subjects for three weeks and are informed about the importance of their choices. The chaplain meets all first-year students in small groups and if required individual students receive counselling on a one-to-one basis. There is a mentoring programme for first years. Fifth-year students are selected to become mentors and each mentor is assigned to four or five first-year students. The mentors receive training from the guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor teaches SPHE to one class group. The support provided for students during their first year in post-primary school is commended.

Second-year students have one guidance class per week. The second-year programme includes topics such as bullying, study skills, homework, planning and organising. The relevance of subjects, the levels at which they are taken and their relationship to life and to careers is also covered. Students are introduced to ICT to carry out a mini career investigation. Careers projects are undertaken. The programme is very relevant and the topics covered are timely. The module on Guidance for second years which is on the DVDs eQuality *Measures* includes resources which can be used to complement the programme. All post-primary schools have received copies of these DVDs.

Third-year students receive a guidance class on a rotational basis every five weeks. The guidance programme covers topics such as study skills, homework and preparation for the Junior Certificate. Students undertake interest inventories and use ICT to investigate career areas. A presentation on programme options for senior cycle is made and an information night for parents is held to inform them about the programme options. A booklet has been prepared by the guidance counsellor to inform students about the subjects available for senior cycle. Subject teachers contributed information about their respective subjects for inclusion in the booklet. The booklet is intended to assist students in their subject choice for senior cycle. As required, students are met on a one-to-one basis for educational and for personal counselling. The junior cycle guidance programmes, which are developmental in nature, are commended as they provide a firm foundation for the personal, educational and career decisions that the students will be required to make in senior cycle.

There are two TY classes and each class has two guidance classes per week. The guidance programme for TY students builds on the junior cycle programme. Additional areas covered are preparation for work experience, obtaining a placement, reflection and analysis of the work experience. Students access relevant web sites to obtain information about courses and careers; these include Qualifax, CareersPortal and Career Directions. Each student selects a career for an in-depth investigation and submits the completed work for assessment. Presentations on senior cycle programme and subject options are made and an information evening for parents is held. Students attend presentations given by visiting speakers and are provided with information about third-level courses and courses in further education and training. They also learn about the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) structure. This entire programme is relevant for TY students.

There is one LCA 1 class group and one LCA 2 class group. The guidance module which is a mandatory element of this programme is delivered by the guidance counsellor. Approximately sixty percent of the students take LCVP and take the link modules which form part of this programme. There are a number of guidance related units in these modules and the guidance counsellor works in co-operation with the LCVP coordinator in the planning and delivery of these units. Each fifth-year group is provided with guidance classes on a rotational basis. The programme builds on the work completed in junior cycle and TY. It introduces students to the

Central Applications Office (CAO) system; it focuses on students' personal qualities, skills and aptitudes; students receive information and investigate alternative routes to the CAO to obtain further education and training; they attend presentations given by outside speakers. Students are encouraged to broaden their perspectives about career possibilities, in line with their interests and aptitudes and they learn about the importance of career planning. LCVP students undertake work experience and career investigations. If required, students are met on a one-to-one basis for educational, career and personal counselling.

Sixth-year students are provided with guidance classes on a rotational basis. They attend a study skills seminar; they get information about the CAO system, further education routes, apprenticeships and training; as required, groups attend a presentation on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); they attend outside career events and college open days. Students are informed about the supports that are available in third-level institutions and about the demands of life after school in terms of finance, study and personal adjustment. It is recommended that information on grants, scholarship and the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme should be provided to all sixth-year students. All sixth-year students are met individually for educational and career guidance and if required, for personal counselling. The guidance programmes for senior cycle students are commended as each programme is developmental and builds on the work undertaken in the previous year.

The guidance counsellor organises information talks and presentations for parents of incoming first years and for parents of other year groups on subject and programme choice; the points system; the CAO and UCAS systems; entry requirements for certain courses; and alternative post leaving certificate (PLC) courses, apprenticeships and other training courses. The information is provided using PowerPoint presentations. Copies of the presentations were examined and the information they provide is clear and comprehensive. It is recommended that the HEAR web site address [www.accesscollege.ie/hear](http://www.accesscollege.ie/hear) be added to the list of web site addresses. The guidance counsellor attends all parent-teacher meetings and parents may make an appointment to discuss any concerns they may have about their sons' education.

A request has been made to the school to dedicate a section of the Rice College Newsletter and web site to highlight notable events in the guidance department. It is recommended that the school accede to this request. A review of the school's website noted that there is no reference to Guidance in the junior cycle section and where there is reference to it in the senior cycle section it is called career guidance. This should be corrected as a priority and *career* should be removed before Guidance. Guidance encompasses three areas: personal and social development, educational guidance, and career guidance and is now referred to as Guidance. It is also recommended that an explanation of the guidance service provided, together with an overview of its aims and objectives as they apply to Rice College and an outline of the guidance programme should be put on the web site.

The school has established links with a wide range of local businesses that assist the school in providing work experience for TY, LCA and LCVP students. Links have also been established with third-level institutions, colleges of further education, FÁS, and other training agencies. The guidance counsellor tracks the initial destination of students when they leave the school and a list of these is compiled.

The guidance counsellor is facilitated to attend continuing professional development (CPD) events and attends the counselling supervision programme which is funded by the Department. It is recommended that all school personnel engaged in personal counselling with students should

attend counselling supervision. This is good practice. The guidance counsellor is a trained Rainbow programme facilitator.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Two classes were visited and lessons observed. The first lesson was an SPHE lesson with a first-year class, delivered by the guidance counsellor. The lesson was delivered in a borrowed classroom and the layout of the furniture was unsuitable for the teaching methodologies used. However, the students moved the desks and arranged the chairs in a circle without prompting from the guidance counsellor. This was done speedily and efficiently but it did eat into the class time. The lesson commenced with a roll call and then the guidance counsellor sat in the circle to commence the lesson. The lesson was taken from an SPHE textbook and the topic was on feelings and expressing them.

A variety of methodologies was used throughout the lesson and included brainstorming, discussion, group work, students asked to demonstrate non-verbal communication, questioning and completion of a worksheet. The pace of the lesson was fast. Students demonstrated familiarity with the methodologies used, and a majority engaged with all of the activities. There was excellent rapport between the guidance counsellor and the students and the atmosphere in the classroom was very relaxed. At the end of the lesson students rearranged the furniture back into classroom style, again without any prompting.

The second class visited was a second-year guidance class. The lesson was carried out in another borrowed classroom and rearranging of the furniture was necessary. The topic of the lesson was the development of a contract on anti-bullying. The lesson commenced with a roll call followed by a recap on the previous lesson. Students were questioned about the meaning of a contract and then were asked to brainstorm about what might be included in their contract. Contracts drawn up by other class groups were examined. Students were divided into groups: each group was required to nominate a recorder who would record the ideas of the group on what might be included in the contract. The recorders wrote their respective group's ideas on the board and a discussion on the ideas ensued. Paper, markers and other equipment were distributed and each group was required to write up a sample contract.

The variety of methodologies and the fast pace of the lesson kept the groups busy and all engaged in the activities. The management of the class was excellent as was the rapport between the guidance counsellor and students. The work was not completed by the end of the class period and students were informed that completion of the contract will take place in the next guidance class.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Incoming students undertake school designed tests in English, Irish and Mathematics. The Drumcondra Reasoning Test is also administered. All first year students take a spelling test in the first term and if considered necessary further diagnostic tests are administered. It is recommended that the list of tests approved for use in 2009/10 for guidance and learning support in post-primary schools should be consulted to ensure that the tests used by the school are appropriate. This list is available on the Department's web site and on the Special Education Support Service (SESS) website [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie). The results of tests are used to assist the school in providing appropriate

learning support for students. A statement on the purpose of testing is included in the guidance plan and this is commended.

From April 2010, the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) will be administered to third-year students who will go directly into fifth-year and to TY students. The results of the DATs will be given to students in an individual interview and will contribute to their decisions around programme and subject choice for the Leaving Certificate.

Students undertake interest tests as part of their guidance programme. Many of these are available on websites such as Qualifax and CareersPortal.

Records of meetings with students and other relevant information are maintained by the guidance counsellor.

### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Rice College is committed to the provision of a caring and supportive environment for its students where they can develop holistically.
- Guidance is considered central to the education of the students and to the supports provided for them.
- All of the ex-quota hours for Guidance are allocated for that purpose and a qualified guidance counsellor co-ordinates the guidance programme.
- Guidance planning has commenced in the school and a guidance planning team has been established.
- There is good balance in the provision of Guidance between junior and senior cycles and between class guidance and one-to-one counselling.
- The school has established good links with outside support services, with local businesses and employers and with third-level colleges, colleges of further education and training bodies.

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

- The guidance plan should be further developed and the recommendations around planning outlined in the body of this report should be implemented in the planning process.
- The provision of a dedicated classroom for Guidance should be considered by management.

Post-evaluation meetings were held 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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