

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT**

**Terence MacSwiney Community College
Holly Hill, Knocknaheeny, Cork
Roll number: 71123Q**

Date of inspection: 13 May 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Terence MacSwiney 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

Terence MacSwiney Community College is a co-educational school in the scheme of the City of Cork Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school is a participant in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. The enrolment of students at the time of the inspection was 356 of whom 172 were post-leaving certificate (PLC) students. The ex-quota allocation for Guidance from the Department of Education and Skills was 16.5 hours per week. These hours are allocated by the Department in accordance with the schedules in Circular PPT12/05 and based on the enrolment and on the school's participation in DEIS. It is indicative of the commitment of the board of management that a further 1.5 hours had been allocated to Guidance from the school's resources. In addition, the middle-management roles of the guidance counsellor in co-ordinating the student-support team, responses to critical incidents and in the joint co-ordination of provision for the additional needs of students, had been formalised as an assistant principal post of responsibility. It is indicative of the commitment of the guidance department that the hours devoted to Guidance are in excess of these allocations.

The allocation for Guidance is used most effectively. Guidance provision is very well integrated, with the other supports provided by the school, into a whole-school system that is efficient, and highly effective. The guidance department comprises a guidance counsellor and another, part-time counsellor. The school has the additional support of staff under the School Completion Programme (SCP) and through the National Behaviour Support Service. It is clear that guidance department links with other staff and departments are ongoing, collaborative and substantial. These include links with senior management, with staff in general and with other support departments such as the special educational needs department and with staff involved in home-school-community liaison (HSCL), chaplaincy and the SCP. Communication among staff is effective and well structured. Informal communication is strengthened by good relationships and by appropriately formalised meetings, documentation and planning. This includes a weekly meeting of a large student-support team at which the needs of students are discussed and actions are planned in fulfilment of those needs. It is noted that, while at the time of the inspection the

post of principal was in transition, this had no negative effect on the inspection. Rather, it attests to the skills of senior management that the inspection process was without apparent stress on the part of the school.

Guidance provision is appropriately balanced. Personal, educational and vocational guidance are delivered throughout the school through a combination of planned inputs, both on a timetabled basis and intermittently. Provision for individual students is comprehensive and personalised, entailing detailed knowledge of students and their backgrounds, and contacts with class groups and with individuals when fitting. The existence of a student-support team comprising a representative group of staff enhances guidance provision and communication through weekly formal meetings and ongoing informal contacts among staff. Key features of the work of the student-support team are its links with parents through contacts subsequent to meetings, and the co-ordination of referrals, internally to the guidance department and other supports and to external agencies.

Student involvement in guidance activities include a programme of mentoring of first-year students by trained senior cycle students. An elected student council operates effectively under the co-ordination of a staff member. The student council has had a large part in the school's healthy eating campaign and in the development of, for example, the school's anti-bullying and substance use policies.

The school's policy of relatively open access by parents facilitates communication with and from the school. Similarly, the school has extensive links with external support services, such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), local general practitioners and with the Health Service Executive (HSE), that are co-ordinated as appropriate through the student-support team. In each case, collaboration among the core student-support departments is characteristic of this work. This is very good practice.

The facilities for Guidance are of a high standard. An office is provided for guidance department use. The office is equipped with the requisite digital and administrative furniture. The office, which is suited to the practice of counselling, is well located in a quiet, accessible and confidential area. The information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are good. Broadband access to guidance-related information is available in the office, in the library, in computer rooms and in classrooms. The well-stocked, managed library contains a subsection devoted to guidance-related information. The library is considerably enhanced by a wide range of visual displays of general and guidance information and by the employment of staff for its management. Other guidance information is on display throughout the building and impresses by its subtle developmental message.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Whole-school guidance planning is at an advanced level and reflects the school's engagement with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). It has been a strength of senior management that departmental planning and policy development have been emphasised. This has had practical and positive results in formalising and adding structure to the whole-school delivery of Guidance. This has included the school's participation in the modular whole-school guidance planning course organised by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). Of particular note are the collaborative integration of the school's supports and the use of well-researched data, in reading and literacy for example, in the formation of plans. This has been achieved in the atmosphere of good relationships and good communication that has been noted

above. It is recommended that these strengths be consolidated by the inclusion in subject-department plans of the supports available on an ongoing basis by subject teachers and by the other supports provided by, for example, the guidance department, the chaplaincy, HSCL and the additional educational needs department.

Guidance department planning is similarly advanced. Good documentation adds clarity to processes that emanate from policies and procedures such as the school's anti-bullying policy, the procedures for dealing with crises, and referrals. The plan outlines the guidance programme appropriately and links the guidance department to the other supports of the school. It is clear that guidance department inputs are extensive. They include provision for all year groups and programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The inclusion of strong links to the social, personal and health education (SPHE) department enhances the delivery of the curricular elements of the guidance programme in the junior cycle. Similarly, provision for parents through planned information sessions and other events, including collaborative inputs into events organised by, for example the SCP, HSCL and chaplaincy, are well noted.

Linkages with employers and institutions of further and higher education and training enable structured approaches to work experience, to visits to the school and to access programmes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, extensive links to supportive organisations in the community provide a pool of effective resources that are appropriately tailored by staff to the needs of students.

An aspect of the guidance department plan particularly noted was the inclusion of short-term plans that clarified the needs of the department. It is clear that such planning was a result of ongoing evaluative practices by the guidance department that involved reflection on the efficacy of guidance provision by the guidance department itself. This is very good practice.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is encouraged and facilitated by senior management. It is clear that, not only is CPD an important element of guidance department planning, but also that considerable attention has been given to providing staff in general with inputs in the domains of professional and personal development. These have included seminars on suicide and anger management. It is indicative of the proactive approach of the school that CPD has included presentations by a NEPS psychologist on self-care for professional carers. This links well with guidance department engagement with professional counselling support, both privately organised and through the service managed by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC). Other presenters have provided inputs on aspects of literacy and numeracy for all staff. Similarly, there is evidence that training in methods appropriate to the teaching of the SPHE has been provided for teachers of that subject. This is very good practice that confirms the value of good policy and departmental structures as a foundation for planning with a focus on professional practices in learning and teaching.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A class of LCA students was observed in the course of a lesson on the completion of the job application form. The room used was optimally equipped for guidance purposes, being a designated guidance classroom and being equipped with fourteen computer workstations and a fixed data projector.

The format of the lesson was in accord with good practice. It began with a short period of settlement during which the roll was called and announcements made. The objectives of the

lesson were clearly stated at the outset and summarised prior to its ending. Effective use was made of the available technology throughout the lesson. This included the projection of key words using the data projector and the use of the whiteboard to display the lesson objectives.

The lesson was well planned. Materials were well prepared and provided effective, varied and ongoing links to the topic. These included a handout which linked the key words used during the lesson and a sample application form. The materials were colourful and practical, and were appropriate to the interests and abilities of the students.

It was clear that good relationships had been established among those present. Students' first names were used throughout the lesson and a supportive atmosphere pervaded. Questions were directed at individual students and displayed sensitivity to their capacity to respond. The use of good humour was effective and facilitated students' interactions, particularly in seeking clarification of points made during the lesson. Directions were clear and unambiguous. Students responded immediately and remained engaged throughout.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment procedures and processes show a clear commitment to self-review and evaluation. The assessment of literacy, numeracy and general ability is carried out prior to entry. The assessment instruments are administered by the guidance department in collaboration with the additional educational needs department. It is clear that the instruments in current use have been selected with a view to fulfilling the needs of the school and the general profile of the student cohort. The results of the assessments are carefully considered with other information gathered during contacts with staff in feeder primary schools. A number of core support staff, including the guidance department use the information to ensure that students are placed in first-year classes to their educational advantage. Further diagnostic assessment is carried out by the additional educational needs department following entry in September and on a regular basis thereafter. This is good practice.

In addition to standardised tests, as outlined above, a range of interest inventories in paper and electronic form is used by the guidance department in the course of lessons and in subsequent interviews with students. This includes inventories associated with the Qualifax and Career Directions websites.

The documentation of procedures and processes is of a very high standard. For example, one document observed displayed, in spreadsheet form, a comprehensive list of supports available to students. This is very good practice, establishing clear student-support links between staff members and between the school and the community. Meetings of the student-support team are well structured and documented, as are records related to referrals to and by the guidance department. Materials and records related to the use of psychometric tests are appropriately stored and documented. A guidance-department document outlining testing and assessment procedures is particularly noted as an example of good practice. Meetings with parents and with students are similarly processed. Applications for entry to courses run by the institutions of further and higher education and training are processed collaboratively by the guidance department and the additional educational needs department. Considerable support for this process is gained from staff in general and, in particular, from those involved in the SCP.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Guidance provision is of a high standard.
- The ex-quota allocation for Guidance is used fully and effectively.
- Guidance is very well integrated with the other supports provided by the school.
- Collaboration among staff and with the community in support of students is highly effective.
- Whole-school guidance planning and guidance department planning are well developed.
- Planning and administrative documentation is of a high standard.
- Guidance is well balanced across all year groups and between personal, educational and vocational guidance.

As a means of building on these strengths, the following key recommendation is made:

- It is recommended that subject-department plans include references to the supports for students made available on an ongoing basis by subject teachers and by the other supports provided by the school.

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

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

Subject Department plans will include references to the supports for students made available on an ongoing basis by subject teachers and by the other supports provided by the school.