Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT

Schull Community College
Colla Road, Schull, County Cork
Roll number: 71102I

Date of inspection: 16 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was high in the lesson observed.
- Guidance provision is appropriately balanced between personal, educational and career guidance.
- The infrastructure of information and communication technology (ICT) is readily available and well utilised in the delivery of Guidance.
- The collaboration of staff and of senior management in support of students is ongoing and effective.
- The organisational structures and the planning of whole-school guidance and support are well developed and documented.
- The student-support team is effective in its co-ordination, integration and management of Guidance and other supports.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration should be given to the inclusion in the school plan of whole-school policies on referrals, confidentiality, assessment and visitors.
INTRODUCTION

Schull Community College is situated on the Mizen Peninsula and caters for the educational needs of the majority of students from this, mainly rural, peninsula. The school is inclusive, supporting all students who present for enrolment. A six-year programme is offered, Transition Year (TY) being compulsory for all students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching and learning observed was high. The lesson was well planned and was delivered to the combined sixth-year cohort in a tiered lecture room. As one of the final lessons for the cohort, it was an appropriate combination of topics that included preparation for the forthcoming certificate examinations, announcements and advice.

• In addition to a clear statement of the objectives of the lesson, instructions to students were concise, questions were focused and clarification of terminology and of issues raised by students was ongoing and accurate. Questions and comments directed at students made good use of well-established relationships and of knowledge of students’ interests and abilities. Questions were of a higher order when appropriate.

• It was clear from the comments of students and from their responses to questions that the content of previous lessons had been assimilated. It was also clear that ongoing formative assessment of students’ progress was a normal feature of classroom practice and of ongoing interactions between staff and students.

• Very good use was made of the school’s ICT system. Not only was an interactive whiteboard used effectively throughout the lesson, but key topics dealt with in this and in previous lessons had been linked to the school’s website which was, itself, well presented and designed.

• Although minimal use was made of textbooks, it was observed that a proprietary diary and information yearbook was used by students as a reference text as appropriate. This was supplemented by a relevant handout and by text and graphics presented on the whiteboard.

• Rapport and communication between students and staff was observed to be good, both in the classroom and in the school in general. It was clear that good relationships had been formed and that these were a major feature of the positive atmosphere during the lesson and of the interactions observed in the school.

• The school has engaged with a project piloting resources and approaches to provision for students with exceptional abilities. It is indicative of teachers’ involvement with the project that the school has taken on a leading role in this regard with other schools.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Guidance provision is of the highest standard. The ex-quota allocation for Guidance from the Department of Education and Skills is 17 hours per week. These hours are used fully in the provision of Guidance. Appropriate provision is made for personal, educational and vocational guidance and the guidance programme is well balanced across the six year groups.

• Collaboration among staff in support of students is well managed and effective. Good communication between staff members and the support of senior management are core
components of the supports available. Communication is enhanced by well-documented procedures and policies.

- The facilities for Guidance include an office that is centrally located and accessible. The office is furnished with the requisite administrative and technological equipment.

- As an additional middle-management responsibility, the guidance department monitors student attendance. This remit enables regular contact with the majority of students and an appropriate focus on those with poorer attendance records. Good use is made of ICT in support of this and of other functions of relevance to Guidance, such as the tracking of students’ initial destinations following the Leaving Certificate examination.

- The school’s website is current and well presented. The website makes clear references to the supports available to students. It is suggested that, where relevant, reference should be made to Guidance rather than to career guidance, in keeping with the well-balanced programme of personal, educational and career guidance observed and in keeping with Department of Education and Skills guidelines.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school has engaged consistently in strategic planning. Well-formed structures are in place that include collaborative teams with well-presented supporting documentation. Teams meet regularly, both formally and informally, and meetings are recorded. This is good practice.

- A document, Mentoring (Pastoral Care) Programme, observed in the course of the evaluation, exemplifies the school’s integrated approach to Guidance and to pastoral care. It is clear that the collaboration of the guidance department and the chaplaincy has enabled a values-focused approach to the support of students. Roles and responsibilities are well defined, students, parents and staff members engage with the process, and students’ responsible behaviour is proactively encouraged.

- The mentoring programme facilitates ongoing planning and review of the supports available to students. The Pastoral Care Team, comprising the guidance counsellor, chaplain and senior management is, in effect, the student-support team. The involvement of the additional educational needs department and of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) department in the support system ensures an ongoing focus on learning and on teaching methods. This team monitors the day-to-day needs of students and manages the school’s responses to those needs, including referrals to external agencies.

- The standard of planning for the lesson observed was high. Clear objectives were stated at the outset, resources and handout materials were at hand and ICT was used effectively to inform and to enhance the lesson. Links to the Qualifax website, and to the school’s own website, had been planned and prepared in advance. These were used skilfully throughout the lesson.

- To enhance such good practice, it is recommended that consideration be given to the development of whole-school approaches to ongoing matters such as referrals, both within the school and to external agencies, confidentiality, and visitors to the school. The school’s ethos is a favourable one for such development and ensuing policies should bring additional clarity to existing processes.
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.
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 welcomes the main findings as being extremely positive. However, members are extremely concerned that a provision as essential as that of Guidance has now effectively been removed through the withdrawal of Guidance as an ex-quota allocation. In the case of Schull Community College this indicates a loss of 0.77 WTE which had been wholly allocated to guidance.

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

The Board will endeavour to implement the recommendation.