

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT

Saint Finian's Community College
Swords, County Dublin
Roll number: 70120F

Date of inspection: 10 November 2015



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

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GUIDANCE**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	9 & 10 November 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellors and teachers • Interaction with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellors

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- The guidance programme demonstrates a good balance between personal, educational and career guidance, with an appropriate balance between classroom guidance and guidance counselling with individual students.
- A key feature of provision is the wide range of student supports available, which are delivered in a very caring, integrated and co-ordinated manner.
- The school has established very strong links with local businesses and third-level colleges to optimise students' learning opportunities.
- Initiatives to promote student progression to further and higher education are proving successful.
- The introduction of an optional Transition Year (TY) programme for the academic year 2016/17 will further enhance the personal, social and educational development of students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Practices for using formative assessment commentary on students' work should be agreed and implemented by the guidance department.
- Every effort should be made to raise awareness and promote interest in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme as a viable option in the school.
- Strategies that provide students with additional access to the internet and to the wide range of guidance resources on line should be explored by the guidance team in association with senior management.
- School management should consider the feasibility of providing a dedicated guidance classroom from the start of the next academic year as an interim measure, pending the planned construction of a new extension to the school.

INTRODUCTION

St Finian's Community College is a co-educational school under the auspices of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, and has an enrolment of 563 students. Almost all senior cycle and junior cycle programmes are offered. The Transition Year (TY) programme will be introduced as an option in the next academic year. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good. The teaching and learning were particularly effective when the right balance was achieved between teacher-led and student-led activities.
- The lessons observed were well planned and well structured. The topics chosen, relating to learning styles, study skills and a career investigation, were appropriate and engaged the students' interest.
- A very good range of resources was used effectively in the lessons observed, including digital presentations, mind maps, video clips and self-assessment questionnaires. Word puzzles and prompts, flash cards and problem-solving exercises were used to good effect to promote learning.
- Active learning methodologies, including group and pair work, were used effectively in many of the lessons. Relationships in the classroom were positive and respectful in the lessons observed, and teachers displayed a clear awareness of the students' personal and career interests.
- It is commendable that senior-cycle students have set up an individual career profile on line that is monitored by the guidance team.
- Affirmation and verbal formative feedback were evident in all of the lessons observed. An examination of students' folders and workbooks indicated that there was scope for more formative commentary on students' written work. It is recommended that practices for using formative assessment commentary on students' work should be agreed and implemented by the guidance team.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support for Guidance are very good.
- The board of management has allocated thirty-eight hours and forty minutes to Guidance; this allocation is used to great effect by the two full-time guidance counsellors. Timetabled classes include Guidance to all Leaving Certificate students, as well as to students in sixth-year LCA.
- The LCA programme is not available in fifth year due to a low level of uptake by the current student cohort. It is recommended that every effort be made to raise awareness and to promote interest in the LCA programme as a viable option in the school.
- It is positive that the school will offer the TY programme to students in the next academic year. The TY programme, which will include modules in Guidance, will further enhance the personal, social and educational development of students.

- It is highly commendable that the school provides a wide range of student supports in a very caring, integrated and co-ordinated manner. The guidance counsellors attend the weekly meetings of the care team. They work very closely and very effectively with year heads, form tutors, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher, the school completion programme co-ordinator and the positive behaviour liaison teacher.
- Initiatives to promote student progression to further and higher education are proving successful. Past-students give talks to year groups, including students in first and second year as part of *College Awareness* week. The school has established strong links with a number of colleges, including Dublin City University. Many of the students benefit from the wide range of initiatives, achievement programmes, access schemes and supports available.
- Effective links with a local business partnership have facilitated many students in learning about the world of work. Some parents avail of a career planning service that is facilitated by Fingal Adult Education Services and the school's HSCL teacher.
- It is positive that a mentoring programme for first-year students includes peer reading and peer numeracy activities. Senior students provide peer education on positive mental health and they assist staff in organising themed events regarding student wellbeing.
- The facilities for Guidance are good and include two fully-equipped offices and access to the computer room, where the number of desktops available to students is limited. It is recommended that the guidance team, in association with school management, explore the feasibility of providing additional access for students to the internet and to the wide range of guidance resources on line.
- In the absence of a dedicated guidance classroom, the guidance team carries a box of resources and workbooks from room to room. It is recommended that school management explore the feasibility of providing a dedicated guidance classroom from the start of the next academic year, pending the construction of a new guidance suite in the planned extension.
- The two guidance counsellors are fully qualified. They regularly attend counselling supervision and continuing professional development, which is good practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation in the guidance department are of a very high standard. The guidance plan is comprehensive and up to date. The schemes of work are very well organised and make explicit reference to learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment.
- The guidance team meets on a weekly basis to plan and coordinate a wide range of activities and the meetings are minuted.
- Record keeping in the guidance department is of a high standard. Records detail students' progress and their initial destinations after the Leaving Certificate. There are well-maintained records of various assessments and standardised tests administered in the course of schooling.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the guidance counsellors at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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