An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Guidance
REPORT

Salesian Secondary College
Pallaskenry, County Limerick
Roll number: 64180O

Date of inspection: 10 May 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN GUIDANCE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Salesian Secondary College, Pallaskenry. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Salesian Secondary College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school in a rural setting approximately twenty kilometres from Limerick City. The school was founded in 1919. It is in the trust of the Salesian Fathers and is located on the estate of the Salesian Agricultural College. Girls and boys are enrolled in almost equal numbers, the current enrolment totalling 410. The number of students enrolled is increasing and is projected by the senior management team to be over 450 in September 2010.

The school has an ex-quota allocation from the Department of Education and Skills of twenty-two hours per week for Guidance. Seventeen of these hours are allocated by the Department in accordance with Circular PPT12/05. The remaining five hours are allocated each year as a result of the school's successful application in 2001 for inclusion in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI). The ex-quota allocation for Guidance is used efficiently by a full-time guidance counsellor in the provision of a programme that is school-wide and well balanced between personal, educational and vocational guidance. This is facilitated by the formal and informal structures that have been established in support of students. The formal structures are clearly based on its mission as a Catholic school and these are supported by the interest and involvement of the Salesian Order. Examples of such support include the pastoral-care system, which includes a year head and class-tutor structure with clear, values-based inputs from the Order and from the religious education (RE) department. A student-mentoring system is in place whereby senior students trained in youth leadership are assigned to newly entered first-year students to ease the transition from primary education.

The close-knit community, which forms the school, facilitates collaboration among staff. Good relationships exist among the guidance department, senior management, the chaplaincy and the additional educational needs department. Communication among these staff members with core support roles is ongoing and effective. Formal communication is achieved through regular

student-support team meetings that are minuted and include representatives of the guidance department, senior management, the chaplaincy and the RE department. Contact among the guidance department, year heads and class tutors is ongoing and effective. Communication is strengthened by regular inputs by the guidance department into staff meetings and by items in *Tutor News*, a weekly news sheet for use by class tutors during weekly meetings with their designated classes.

Clear evidence exists that guidance provision for students with additional educational needs is given some priority and that collaboration with the additional educational needs department is ongoing and effective. It is recommended that, in view of such good practice and as an additional enhancement of communication and whole-school planning of supports for students, a representative of the additional educational needs team be included in student-support team meetings.

Senior cycle classes are timetabled for Guidance for one class period per week. Guidance for junior cycle classes is provided intermittently on a planned basis. Close collaboration between the guidance department and the social, personal and health education (SPHE) department enables the efficient delivery of common curricular elements of both areas. Staff members have developed a study skills module that is applied during the early stages of first year. It is noteworthy that this initiative is in keeping with the intention of the school, in applying for the GEI, to focus on the needs of students in the junior cycle. Other evidence of successful outcomes of the GEI include a well-formed process of induction for new students, including a review of first-year students' experiences of the transition from primary school and regular, informal contact between the guidance department and year heads.

The facilities for Guidance are very good. They include flexible accommodation that can cater for groups of students and is suited to the practice of counselling. The information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are of a very high standard and include access to broadband internet and the widespread availability of data projectors and other electronic equipment that are used very effectively for guidance purposes. It is significant that the ICT system is managed by an external agency. As an online service, regular checks of the system are made with minimal disruption to the school. Displays of guidance-related materials were observed on notice boards, in corridors and in classrooms throughout the building. The materials were current, visually attractive and provided direct and subliminal reminders of ongoing issues in Guidance.

The effectiveness of the guidance and support structures are a clear reflection of the effective leadership of senior management. Responsibility is delegated appropriately and staff responses to such delegation include the formation of an effective referral system, both within the school and with external agencies. Ongoing communication among staff in this regard is well documented and appropriate. This is good practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Whole-school guidance planning is well structured and is of a high standard. A team has been formed that comprises the guidance counsellor, pastoral-care co-ordinator, programme co-ordinator, school planning co-ordinator and the principal. The expertise and experience of the team members exemplifies the high status of good planning in the school. It is clear that the development-planning processes encouraged by the School Development Planning Initiative

(SDPI) have been applied by the team and that the process adopted at the Salesian Secondary College is well documented. The team has reviewed the school's range of optional subjects and has considered the procedures followed by students in selecting those subjects for the certificate examinations. It is recommended that in considering this issue, the principle of informed choice be applied. It is also recommended that decisions be made after appropriate engagement by students with the range of available subjects. The school's decision that all junior cycle students study Science and a modern European language broadens the range of subjects and career options available to students, especially in the latter years of post-primary education. Currently, optional subjects for the Leaving Certificate examination are based on students' preferences while optional Junior Certificate examination subjects are chosen prior to entry. A DVD, *eQuality Measures* that may inform discussion in this regard was circulated to schools by the Department in 2010. In that context, the practice of withdrawing students with additional educational needs from particular subjects, such as Science, should be reconsidered.

The team has also considered the proposal that, in promoting responsible behaviour, a new emphasis be placed on affirmative responses to the behaviour of students. Considering the implications for students, it is recommended that they be involved in the process from the outset. The student council is an appropriate body by which the opinions of students might be gathered. The council is already a significant element of the school's structures, having been instrumental in the school's achievement of Green Flag status in April 2010. It is also recommended that the student council be involved in the ongoing review of relevant policies. Further information regarding these and other possibilities for involving students in the school's processes may be found on the Student Council Support Service website at http://www.studentcouncil.ie/ and the Irish Second-level Students' Union website at http://issu.ie/.

Guidance department planning is also of a high standard and is well structured and documented. The plan includes a well-balanced guidance programme outline that shows inputs into all year groups and into the Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), both of which are optional and show a strong uptake by students. The annual review of the guidance programme by senior cycle students and by parents is a formal element of guidance planning. In addition, staff evaluations are aggregated from questionnaires that are completed following events with guidance inputs, such as the annual open evening for the parents of incoming students. This is very good practice. In addition to the long-term and medium-term aims and objectives observed in the plan, it is recommended that, as a useful addition to annual discussions with the senior-management team regarding the next school year, the short-term aims and objectives be also included. Similarly, in subject department planning it is good practice to include reference to the supports available to students both from within a department and from the school in general, including the guidance department, additional educational needs department and the chaplaincy.

A comprehensive staff handbook has been compiled that makes clear reference to procedures, policies and practices with implications for Guidance and for the care of students. This is good practice. It is noteworthy that the support of staff is also given high priority in the handbook and is indicative of adherence to the school's mission in normal practice.

The school has established extensive links with community, educational and supportive groups and institutions. These links are used in the arrangement of visits to the school by, for example, representatives of the institutions of further and higher education and training, and by representatives of organisations and agencies who provide inputs directly into the guidance programme, SPHE and other subjects. Groups of students attend open days and other information events. Arrangements are also made for the attendance by individual students at other events

according to their needs. The collaboration of staff in these arrangements exemplifies the effective work done by the guidance department in keeping with the school's core values.

Guidance department engagement with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) is ongoing. This includes participation in the regular meetings of the Institute, with the encouragement and facilitation of senior management, and in sessions of professional counselling support organised by the IGC with the support of the Department.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Preparation for the Leaving Certificate examination was the topic of the lesson observed. The lesson was well planned and executed. The room was appropriately equipped with a permanent data projector, a whiteboard and other requisites that facilitated the conduct of an effective lesson. It was clear from students' engagement with the lesson that the content was relevant and that the structure was familiar.

The lesson began with a roll call and a brief overview of the content. The variety of methods used was wide. Questions were used skilfully to prompt student thought. Students' own experiences formed the basis of discussion about, for example, the issues that affect the efficiency of revision and the common pitfalls facing those taking examinations. Clear links were established between students' experiences and the practical implications of the findings of the psychology of study. Students' responses were noted on the whiteboard and were incorporated into spider diagrams that clarified the links between the various concepts elicited. These links were well anticipated, integrated into a summary of the issues in a printed handout and shown as an electronic slide presentation.

It was clear that relationships in the classroom were good, facilitating the productive exchange of ideas in an atmosphere that was relaxed yet attentive. Students responded well to the material presented, which was accurate and, when necessary, practical. A flipchart, for example, was used in a practical demonstration of the importance of a structured approach to the accumulation of marks in an examination.

The content of the lesson was summarised and announcements were made before the lesson ended. This process was effective in bringing together the issues raised during the lesson and in placing them in a context that was practical and relevant to the needs of students.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment practice is collaborative and comprehensive and adheres to appropriate standards of confidentiality. The guidance department and additional educational needs department have clear roles in the process that include the gathering, processing and communication of information regarding the assessments to management, staff, parents and students as appropriate. In addition to administering tests of general ability, literacy and numeracy to students newly registered for enrolment, visits to feeder primary schools are made by the guidance department to accumulate more specific information regarding the educational needs of those registered to enter Salesian

College. Subsequently, the additional educational needs department continues with the diagnostic assessment of students whose needs have been prioritised following the earlier assessments.

In the course of the guidance programme, other assessments include the administration of an aptitude test as part of the transition from the junior cycle to the senior cycle, and the use of various interest and career inventories, particularly among students in the senior cycle. These include web-based instruments associated with, for example, the Qualifax, Career Directions and Careers Portal websites.

The recording, analysis and reporting of assessment information is appropriate and of a very high standard. The use of ICT in this regard exemplifies its usefulness in the analysis of data and in the simplification of administrative tasks, such as list compilation and the sharing of relevant information between the guidance department and the additional educational needs department. Other guidance-department records, including records of the currents status of past students, show a similarly high regard for clarity and consistency, in keeping with good practice. It is of interest that the professional profile of the guidance department is enhanced by the clear labelling of documents produced by it, whether for use in the course of classroom Guidance or for more general distribution of information among students, staff and parents.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The ex-quota allocation for Guidance is used efficiently by a full-time guidance counsellor in the provision of a programme that is school-wide.
- The guidance programme is well balanced between personal, educational and vocational guidance.
- Collaboration of staff in support of students is widespread.
- Guidance planning is very well advanced.
- The guidance programme is reviewed regularly, with inputs from students.
- ICT is used extensively by the guidance department.
- The documentation of plans, processes and interventions is of a high standard.

As a means of building on these strengths, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the additional educational needs department be represented in the student-support team.
- The student council should be invited to participate in the review of relevant policies.

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.

Published, December 2010