

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

School name	Ballymakenny College
School address	Ballymakenny Road Drogheda
Roll number	91573N

Date of Inspection: 31-01-2020



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Guidance under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	28-01-2020 and 31-01-2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussions with the senior management team, guidance counsellors and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during two lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and guidance team.

School context

Ballymakenny College is a co-educational community school, which was established in 2014 under the shared patronage of the Louth Meath Education and Training Board and Educate Together. Current student enrolment is 843. The school provides the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good, but opportunities for peer-to-peer questioning, learning new vocabulary and facilitating further classroom discussion were not fully exploited.
- The guidance team demonstrates a commendable expertise in the administration of psychometric assessments and in tracking student progress.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for guidance-related activities is very good, but the guidance programme at junior cycle and students' access to the LCVP programme require attention.
- There is a highly commendable integrated, whole-school and collaborative approach to supporting students' wellbeing, but meetings of the student support team are not held frequently enough.
- Student leadership and student voice are actively promoted; this contributes to the fostering of a very positive learning environment and a strong sense of community in the school.
- Individual planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a very high quality, but the whole-school guidance plan is in draft form.

Recommendations

- Students should be further facilitated to ask each other questions, to practise new terminology and to expand on their ideas, opinions and experiences in lessons.
- The guidance department should review the Junior Cycle guidance programme to include a unit of learning encompassing career exploration as part of Junior Cycle Wellbeing.
- School management should explore the feasibility of extending access to LCVP to a wider cohort of students, not just to those who have an Irish exemption.
- The whole-school guidance plan, should be finalised as a matter of priority and presented to the board of management for ratification.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good. The lessons visited were characterised by a sense of purpose and appropriate pace. Commendably each lesson built on students' prior learning, knowledge and understanding.
- Each lesson was very well planned and was commendably based on students' interests and learning needs. Resources were used effectively and these included digital presentations, work sheets and mini white boards.
- A range of effective, active methodologies was used to stimulate student thought and engagement. Students were provided with valuable opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively. Each task built incrementally on the previous task and there was good consolidation of the learning at the end of each lesson.
- All of the guidance lessons visited were held in a computer room and effective use was made of information and communications technology (ICT). In one lesson, the students completed a survey online about their individual concerns regarding starting in college, and the instant feedback from the survey was used productively to inform the subsequent focus of the lesson. In another lesson observed, students were encouraged to complete a task by conducting their own independent research online.
- Appropriate attention was paid to developing students' literacy through the highlighting of key words and subject-specific terminology. However, having been introduced to the new terms, students were not given enough opportunities to practice them in context. It is recommended that students be better facilitated to practice and apply new terminology.
- In-class assessment generally took the form of questioning, with a few examples noted of probing questions that helped to challenge and deepen students' learning. Much of the probing involved teachers questioning students and students answering. There were very few examples observed of students openly asking each other questions or discussing feedback from group work in a plenary session. It is recommended that opportunities for students to ask each other questions and to expand on their ideas, opinions and experiences be further exploited in lessons.
- The relationships between students and their teachers were warm and encouraging. Commendably the teachers moved around the room, assessing students' progress and supporting them individually in their learning.
- The guidance team demonstrates a commendable expertise in the administration of standardised testing. An appropriate range of interest inventories, aptitude and ability tests is administered to students. It is a positive development that the outcomes of these assessments are discussed with the students and their parents with a view to assisting the students to set goals, to track their own progress, choose subjects and decide on a suitable career path. This is very good practice.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for guidance-related activities is very good. School management and staff are very supportive of the service. The guidance team comprises a full-time guidance counsellor and a second member of staff who is currently completing a recognised course. The addition of a second guidance counsellor is a welcome

development in view of the size of the school and the large number of students availing of the service.

- Currently timetabled classroom provision for Guidance is largely confined to senior cycle, with modules in Guidance appropriately timetabled for TY, fifth year and sixth year. The remaining hours are allocated to guidance counselling with individual students.
- At the time of the evaluation, the guidance programme for junior cycle students was limited to guidance counselling, standardised assessments and a small number of guidance inputs. It is recommended that the guidance department further develops the junior cycle guidance programme to include a unit of learning encompassing career exploration, as part of Junior Cycle Wellbeing.
- A comprehensive induction programme is in place to ensure a successful transition for students coming from primary schools into the post-primary school. This includes a student mentoring programme, a peer education programme and subject sampling.
- Ensuring students experience a variety of work placements is a key element of the school's TY and LCVP programmes. LCVP is currently offered as an additional programme to senior cycle students who have the appropriate combination of subjects, as well as an exemption in Irish. It is recommended that school management explores the feasibility of extending access to LCVP to a wider cohort of students, who do not necessarily have an Irish exemption but who might also benefit from the programme.
- The TY work experience programme is very well coordinated and counts significantly for TY credits. It is positive that TY students benefit from sampling subjects before choosing options for the Leaving Certificate.
- Senior cycle students are regularly facilitated to attend career talks and visit college open days. It is commendable that the guidance team works closely with other local schools in hosting an annual careers fair for the town's students. There is scope to expand activities during College Awareness Week to further engage students' interests while in junior cycle.
- There is a highly commendable integrated, whole-school, and collaborative approach to supporting students. The guidance team collaborates very well with the SEN department, the wellbeing team and other staff to provide a very supportive and caring environment for the students. Among the many programmes provided are *Beat the Blues*, *Friends for Life*, and Rainbows. Themed weeks include healthy eating, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI) awareness, and positive mental health as part of the school's Amber Flag initiative.
- The student support team meets every three weeks, but such meetings are not frequent enough in view of increasing student enrolments. It is recommended that the student support team meets more frequently. While referrals are made to the appropriate national support agencies, there is scope for the guidance service to establish closer links with other community-based supports in the locality.
- It is commendable that student leadership and student voice are actively promoted. This contributes to the fostering of a very positive learning environment and a strong sense of community in the school.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a very high quality. Guidance-related policies such as those dealing with anti-bullying and critical incidents are regularly reviewed.

- It is commendable that a guidance planning task group was established at the start of the current academic year to review and evaluate the service. They have drafted a comprehensive whole-school guidance plan, but it is recommended that they consult with other relevant stakeholders. It is recommended that the whole-school guidance plan be finalised as a matter of priority and be presented to the board of management for ratification.
- The quality of documentation and record keeping is exemplary. These show due consideration for ethical issues, such as confidentiality, the security of test materials and data protection.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and guidance team at the conclusion of the evaluation.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;