

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta  
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Guidance  
REPORT**

**Castleknock College  
Castleknock, Dublin 15  
Roll number: 60100Q**

**Date of inspection: 8 May 2006  
Date of issue of report: 15 December 2006**

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## **Report on the Quality of Provision in Guidance**

This Guidance Inspection report

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock College, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. 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.

### **Guidance Provision and Whole School Support**

Castleknock College is a voluntary secondary school for boys. Guidance is well supported by management and valued by the wider school community of parents and the school board of governors. Management in the school views Guidance as a very necessary support for students' learning and as a valuable aid to assist transitions. The school has an allocation of twenty-two ex-quota hours for Guidance, and the Guidance counsellor manages Guidance and counselling provision for all students. The school is making full use of the allocation of 22 hours provided for Guidance purposes. Guidance is provided as an integrated model with counselling and is considered to constitute a whole school support for students. The college prides itself on the high level of care provided to assist students' development and support all aspects of their academic and personal progression within the school. Students can avail of Guidance and counselling support throughout their time in the college, and can also seek a referral through form teachers, tutors and teachers. Guidance is viewed by management as an important asset to the school community and is managed so that it interlinks well with all other care initiatives. Guidance also links with the form and tutor structures to identify students requiring support and advice. However, it is suggested that Guidance provision could be greatly strengthened by the creation of a role for Guidance within the school's administration committee. At the regular meetings of this group, students' educational and other needs are discussed and the presence of personnel who provide and manage both educational and personal supports would enhance services for students. At present only a small number of students identified as requiring SEN support are enrolled. These students all have full access to appropriate Guidance and counselling support.

The timetable for Guidance is currently designed to provide formal classes only for fourth year (Transition Year Programme) students. Guidance for this group aims to provide expertise and support for students planning and implementing the programme's vocational module. Guidance for other year groups is delivered in two ways, by arranging one-to-one interviews with students and, with the assistance of other teachers, taking class groups to deliver inputs on educational and career guidance topics. The guidance counsellor is fully involved in supporting the smooth transition of new students entering the school, contributes to the transition programme for students and meets with parents and students on a number of occasions. Parents are kept fully informed about subject options and the Guidance service is available to answer all queries about subject combinations and the possible career implications of choices. To develop further this excellent process and provide staff and parents with an even clearer picture of what student supports are available, it is recommended that the staff handbook, the student journal and the college website should provide some information on how Guidance in the school is managed to support learning, the range of subjects being offered in the school, and the type of personal supports provided for students. Alternatively, a separate booklet (or college website entry) explaining the possible career and third-level course implications of certain subject choices (and omissions) and the levels at which subjects are studied could be prepared by the college to inform parents and students. The college provides a very comprehensive range of subjects and student supports and this information should be more accessible to staff and parents.

A dedicated office for Guidance is provided within the school. This is suitably equipped and well located to allow full access to students wishing to make appointments, meet with the Guidance counsellor or seek information on career or personal issues. In the near future it is proposed that a new Guidance suite will be provided within the new refurbished buildings in the school. This will provide a room where meetings with small groups of students can be held, a more comprehensive careers library can be made accessible to students, and ICT facilities can be provided to enable students to do web searches with the assistance of the Guidance counsellor. The parents' representative group spoke highly of the school's Guidance service and particularly mentioned the excellent level of attention paid to addressing individual students' issues. The provision of Guidance is managed to provide a range of one-to-one and group sessions, and students can avail of a highly personalised service upon demand. Staff in the school co-operate well with the Guidance service to make classes available for Guidance and arrange referrals for students. A well-structured Guidance programme is being delivered to students in fifth and sixth years. Ample opportunities are provided for students to explore options available in third level colleges and in employment. The Guidance service focuses on meeting the individual needs of students and tailors information and responses to meet these needs. Students are also invited to meet one-to-one with the Guidance counsellor to plan and implement individual further learning and career progressions. Personal counselling support for students is provided. But when it is deemed necessary, students are referred on (after full consultation with parents) to outside agencies and care facilities for psychological, psychiatric and other appropriate personal support. Good contact is maintained by the school during any enforced absence of students due to illness or other reasons, and the re-integration of these students back into the school is supported by the Guidance service. In order to strengthen this referral further, it is suggested that some additional networking be completed with all local and national agencies catering for adolescents. All meetings with students are recorded and the follow-up on queries is promptly handled and well managed. Senior students are facilitated to attend relevant college open-days and some career events. The college hosts a careers night when outside speakers and college past-men provide information on careers for students and parents.

### **Planning and Preparation**

The school Guidance plan has not yet completed, but an outline plan of how Guidance is managed in the school was drafted in September 2005, and this was supplied for the inspection visit. The plan states the aims for educational and vocational Guidance and personal counselling support for students. It is recommended that the school Guidance plan should now be compiled in accordance with advice from the booklet issued by the National Centre for Guidance in Education, Planning a School Guidance Programme (NCGE, 2004). Building on the existing draft document, the school guidance plan should clearly state what Guidance is provided for each year group, inputs to each school programme (Junior Certificate, Transition Year and Leaving Certificate), and give details of how Guidance is integrated into the school's pastoral, form and tutor system and with parents.

Junior cycle students have access to Guidance when they are making the transition into the school and at a number of points during their first three years. Many are referred (or self-refer) for individual interviews to address personal concerns. Meetings with groups are also occasionally arranged to provide more information on subject choices. There is at present an imbalance in the planning of Guidance between junior and senior cycles, with a heavy emphasis on providing Guidance support for students in fourth, fifth and sixth years. The Education Act (1998) in section 9 states that a school shall use its available resources to

(c) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices

Assistance on planning Guidance provision for all students can be accessed in the Guidelines for Second-Level Schools on the implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act (1998), relating to students' access to appropriate Guidance. This document, issued in 2005, has been sent to all schools. In order that all students have fuller access to educational and vocational guidance throughout their time in the college, it is recommended that some more

regular Guidance inputs for junior cycle students should be planned. Some classes are being arranged for third years in the current plan, where subject options are discussed and the benefits of the Transition Year Programme are outlined. However, more regular contact with the Guidance counsellor would allow junior cycle students to start building a greater consciousness of possible career routes and facilitate discussions on subject options (and groupings of subjects) for senior cycle. As the junior cycle curriculum is already crowded, it is suggested that this input of additional Guidance should be planned in conjunction with the Social Personal and Health Education programme (SPHE). The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), 'Handbook for Guidance Counsellors' should also be consulted regularly as well as their website, ([www.ncge.ie](http://www.ncge.ie)). It is therefore recommended, that the draft Guidance plan be completed to include all Guidance interventions and that it be presented to management, staff, parents and students for consultation and then to the school's board of governors as a planning document. It is further recommended that this plan be revised annually.

The Guidance programme for senior students is very comprehensive and is responsive to particular students' needs and demands. It provides opportunities for students to engage very interactively with the Guidance counsellor in group and in one-to-one sessions to discuss progression options into third level education and careers. Good contacts have been established with all major third level colleges both nationally and internationally. Students are assisted to make course choices and facilitated to make applications for college places through the Central Applications System (CAO) and the U.K. United Colleges Application System UCAS. A range of outside speakers is invited to the school to provide insights into a wide number of career areas. Engagement in work experience in Transition Year provides opportunities for students to engage in work experience. The Guidance programme builds on the knowledge gained by spending time in the world or work and it encourages students to develop good personal understanding of individual interests and strengths. The initial progression routes of students are being mapped to provide information for the college and for the Guidance programme.

The Guidance counsellor is supported to access on-going in-service training and to attend personal supervision sessions to support counselling.

### **Teaching and Learning**

During the inspection visit, a Guidance class with a first year group was visited. The lesson was planned to make full use of appropriate methodologies to suit the stage of development of the students, the range of abilities in the group and to address different learning styles. A good classroom atmosphere prevailed in the class that was conducive to learning and this was supported by the good choice of materials for the topic chosen. Students were very attentive and were involved actively in the lesson. Their answering of the questions posed demonstrated that they understood the topic being presented and could discuss aspects of the issues raised. Appropriate homework was assigned to consolidate learning. To improve the lesson further, it is suggested that a short input of brainstorming the topic would be useful to introduce the theme to students. In addition, a short demonstration on how to formulate a question as well as complete an answer would have enhanced understanding among students.

### **Assessment and Achievement**

A range of assessment and psychometric tests are available to students. It is planned to expand the array of psychometric and other assessment instruments (including ICT versions) once the new guidance suite is available. The Differential Aptitude Test (DATS) is administered to students to assist them to identify areas of strength. Feed-back is provided one-to-one to students. Those making transitions from the school are individually assisted to make choices and plan individual education and career routes.

Good record keeping is evident in the school's Guidance department. Dates of students' one-to-one meetings with the Guidance counsellor are recorded. Students' project and class-work on careers is appropriately stored and corrected. Feedback on tests completed and work submitted is provided in a way that is designed to benefit individual progress and insights. Excellent contact is maintained with parents.

## **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

The following are the main strengths and areas for development identified in the evaluation:

- Guidance is viewed as a whole school support and is well planned and managed within the college
- The college's Guidance plan is being developed
- The programme being provided for senior cycle students is comprehensive
- Students have ready access to a wide range of Guidance and counselling supports
- Parents can meet by appointment with the Guidance counsellor

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the school Guidance plan be completed and presented for consultation to management, staff, parents, students and then to the board of governors
- As the school is undergoing major refurbishment of its buildings, it is recommended that the new Guidance suite should be developed to provide enhanced educational, career and personal support facilities for students using ICT
- It is recommended that the student journal and the staff handbook are amended to include some information about Guidance support in the school
- It is recommended that more Guidance be provided for students in junior cycle to foster a greater understanding of educational and career choices, in consultation with the SPHE and religious education programmes

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.