

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Guidance

REPORT

School name	Ashbourne Community School
School address	Deerpark Ashbourne Co Meath
Roll number	91495T

Date of Inspection: 04-04-2019



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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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	03 & 04-04-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with the senior management team, guidance team and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and guidance team

School context

Ashbourne Community School is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the joint patronage of Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and the Catholic Bishop of Meath. The school has a current enrolment of 1023 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate, the school offers an optional Transition Year programme (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall, with some very effective practices evident; in the most effective lessons observed the appropriate balance was achieved between teacher exposition and student interaction.
- The quality of assessment of the guidance modules is satisfactory and requires further development.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support is very good; a highly commendable balance has been achieved in the provision of Guidance at both junior and senior cycle.
- There is a whole-school integrated approach taken to the provision of Guidance; current arrangements in relation to student support, first-year induction and the promotion of wellbeing are of a very high quality.
- TY students spend one day a week on work experience which represents over twenty per cent of the entire TY programme.
- Planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a high quality, but some Guidance-related policies would benefit from a review.

Recommendations

- The very good practice observed in some lessons of the students' active and collaborative engagement in learning should be extended to more lessons.
- The guidance department should further develop its formal assessment practices in relation to guidance modules for each year group, to include more student project work on subject choices, careers and course investigations, for example.
- School management should keep the amount of time assigned to TY work experience under review to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences inherent in the TY programme.
- Senior management should ensure that the Guidance plan and all Guidance-related policies are reviewed, as a priority, and submitted 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 good overall, with some very effective practices evident. In the most effective lessons observed the appropriate balance was achieved between teacher exposition and student interaction.
- All of the lessons were well organised and structured, and were characterised by respectful relationships between the teachers and the students. Commendably the learning intentions were shared with students at the start of each class, but in many of the lessons observed time management impacted on the effective assessment and consolidation of the learning intentions. It is recommended that in preparing their lessons, teachers plan for enough time to assess and consolidate the learning intentions.
- The lessons observed included well-prepared resources such as digital presentations and short video clips that were topical, informative and relevant.
- In some of the lessons observed, the teacher's voice predominated, and opportunities for students' active engagement in collaborative work, feedback and discussion were not fully exploited.
- In the most effective lessons observed, very good use was made of strategies which facilitated active and collaborative learning. Teachers drew on the students' own ideas and prior learning to build on and extend student understanding. Commendably, students were provided with opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively, through pair work, group work and engaging in independent research. In these very effective lessons, students demonstrated high levels of participation in learning, contributing their ideas, opinions and experiences to class discussion. It is recommended that these very effective practices be extended to more lessons.
- The quality of assessment was satisfactory overall. In-class assessment included the effective use of questioning, work sheets and exit tickets. Commendably the teachers moved around the room, assessing students' progress, affirming and supporting them individually in their learning.
- Effective assessment strategies have been put in place to evaluate the work experience modules in TY, LCA and LCVP. However, currently there are no formal arrangements in place to assess student progress in the guidance modules delivered to other year groups. It is recommended that the guidance department further develops its formal assessment practices in relation to the guidance modules in other year groups, to include more student project work on subject choices, careers and course investigations, for example.
- An appropriate range of interest inventories, aptitude and ability tests is administered to students. The outcomes of these assessments are discussed with the students with a view to assisting them to choose a suitable career path.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and support for Guidance is very good. School management is very supportive of the service. At the time of the evaluation, the Guidance allocation had been distributed among three fully-qualified guidance counsellors, while students were also benefitting from the support of the school's chaplaincy service.
- Modules in classroom Guidance are appropriately timetabled in a sequential and timely manner for students in every year group, and this represents a very effective and efficient use of resources. A highly commendable balance has been achieved in the provision of Guidance at both junior and senior cycle.

- During the evaluation, very close collaboration was evident between the special educational needs (SEN) department and the guidance team, one of whom is also an educational psychologist. The guidance counsellors and the SEN co-ordinator are members of the Student Support Team that meets regularly and provides an effective forum for dealing with students' issues. Effective links have been established with the relevant support agencies.
- It is commendable that the school recently organised its first Careers Fair, which was open to the entire community. Career and college talks are also held regularly.
- Ensuring students experience a variety of work placements is a key element of the TY, LCA and LCVP programmes. This good practice helps to broaden students' future career horizons. TY students currently spend one day a week on work experience. This represents over twenty per cent of the entire TY programme. While both students and staff report on the benefits of the work placements, it is recommended that school management keep the amount of time allocated to TY work experience under review, to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences inherent in the TY programme.
- Arrangements in relation to student support, first-year induction and the promotion of wellbeing are of a very high quality. Effective use is made of the *Education Passport* as part of a very innovative induction programme to help ensure a smooth transition for students from primary into the post-primary school. Very good links have been established with the feeder primary schools. Commendably, students and parents have been surveyed on the effectiveness of the school's induction programme.
- Information on the broad range of subjects on offer is provided to both students and parents by way of seminars and information packs. The school endeavours to keep abreast of developments, and has added Japanese, Politics and Society and Physical Education to its curriculum as examination subjects in the Leaving Certificate.
- An innovative, integrated and highly effective approach is taken to supporting students and their wellbeing at whole-school level. Annual themed events for both students and staff include a focus on healthy eating, fitness, friendships and positive mental health. Programmes for students include *Friends for Life*, *Beat the Blues*, *Outcomers* and *Resilience Academy*. It is commendable that a number of TY students have been trained by Jigsaw to provide peer education to students at junior cycle, while senior prefects also act as mentors.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning, preparation and organisation in the guidance department are of a high quality.
- The updated whole-school guidance plan is very comprehensive and includes appropriate references to the Framework for Junior Cycle and the Wellbeing Guidelines. It is commendable that the guidance plan also makes key references to the Whole-School Guidance Framework, recently published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). However the plan is still in draft form and has not yet been ratified by the board.
- All guidance-related policies are in place. However many are dated and would benefit from a review. The current policy on Response to Critical Incidents dates back to 2007, although the contacts list has recently been updated. Similarly the anti-bullying policy dates back to 2014, and requires updating. The senior management team reported that they have established a process to review policies on a systematic basis. It is recommended that they now ensure that the Guidance plan and all Guidance-related policies are reviewed, as a priority, and submitted to the board of management for ratification.
- Record keeping is of a high standard and common templates have been developed to ensure consistency across the department.

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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Ashbourne Community School welcomes the many positive observations in the report including:

- The high quality of planning, preparation and organisation within the Guidance department
- The good quality of teaching and learning
- The innovative, integrated and highly effective approach taken to supporting students and their wellbeing

The Board welcomes the comments regarding:

- Well organised and structured lessons
- Respectful relationships between students and teachers
- Active and collaborative learning
- Very good links with the feeder primary schools
- A broad range of subjects on offer
- The close collaboration between the SEN department and the Guidance team
- The Careers fair which was open to the entire community

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Board welcomes the recommendations set out in the inspection report and has agreed to the following:

- The revised Guidance plan will be presented to the Board for ratification and related Guidance policies will be reviewed
- School management will review the current TY work experience model
- The Guidance Department will further develop its formal assessment practices

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;