

**Scoil Mhuire agus Ide
Newcastle West
Co. Limerick.**

DRAFT SCHOOL GUIDANCE POLICY

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Introduction

The school guidance policy is an area of strategic planning that has evolved in recent years in response to the Education Act, 1998. Section 9 C of the Act states that a school shall use its available resources to:

'Ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance.'

Guidance is focused on student progress and development in three key areas: personal and social, educational and careers.

Our Mission Statement outlines our educational philosophy in full. In brief we aspire to help our students to take their place in society as educated, mature and committed Christians. We want our school to be not only a centre of academic excellence but also a caring community where personal faith is nurtured and developed.

We aim to create a caring environment in which everyone recognises the value of each individual and encourages an awareness of, and a response to, the needs of others. We aim to foster an appetite for learning and to develop self-discipline, initiative, responsibility and perseverance. We also aim to involve our students in the life-long process of education and to ensure that everyone achieves some degree of success in life. We value all kinds of achievement and we work to promote a school culture, which values diversity and nurtures an ethos of respect for self, others, and the wider community.

In Scoil Mhuire agus Íde we endeavour to ensure that each student has access to the school's Guidance and Counselling service in the light of these aims set out in our Mission Statement.

Description of School

Scoil Mhuire agus Ide is a co-educational Voluntary Catholic Secondary School and was founded in 1992 with the amalgamation of Scoil Mhuire, a convent secondary school, run by the sisters of Mercy and St. Ita's

Secondary School, a voluntary lay secondary school for boys. The school has a Board of Trustees and a board of Management and it follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Science which may be amended from time to time in accordance with sections 9 and 30 of the education Act 1998. It operates within the regulations laid down by the D.E.S., which may be amended from time to time. The school depends on the grants and resources provided by the D.E.S. and school policy in all areas must have regard to the resources and funding made available to us by the D.E.S.

Aims and Objectives of Guidance Policy

Guidance in this school aims:

- To promote the social and personal development of the students
- To assist in the educational needs of students
- To assist in the vocational development of the students
- To assist the students to make choices
- To provide direction and help to the students to move forward to take their role in society
- To nurture in the students a positive attitude to responsible citizenship

The objective of the School Guidance Policy is to ensure that the resources of the school are available to all students. However, in some cases that may not be possible and the school management may need to prioritise the service in favour of particular class groupings. The following may be regarded as priority groups:

- All final year students in the school
- Third Year students who are deciding on Senior Cycle Programmes and subject choice
- First Year students on their transition from Primary School.

Definition

For the purposes of this policy, Guidance refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence, designed to assist students to make choices about their lives and to make changes in the light of these choices.

These choices can be divided as follows:

- Personal and social
- Educational
- Career

Guidance is an on-going process involving a wide range of learning activities such as information giving, counselling, and assessment. These are offered at the appropriate age and to meet the needs of the student. The process helps the students to develop and accept a full personal, social, educational and career awareness of their talents and abilities and in this way it helps students to grow in independence and to make well informed decisions.

Guidance is a whole school responsibility. The development and implementation of the overall Guidance Plan involves:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Year Heads
- Guidance Counsellor(s)
- Student mentor(s)
- Class Tutors
- SPHE Co-ordinator
- Learning Support teachers
- TY Co-ordinator
- LCVP Co-ordinator
- Student Council Co-ordinator
- Specialist Teachers
- Religion Teachers
- Subject Teachers
- Computer/IT Skills teacher to help with computer aided guidance programmes and UCAS applications
- Ancillary Staff
- Psychological Service (NEPS)

Furthermore, the Pastoral Care Team, which includes the Guidance Counsellor, in conjunction with staff and management, will be central to supporting policies which attempt to deal with in-school issues, e.g. bullying, bereavement, coping with tragedy or any other issues that may arise.

The Guidance Counselling Service will include some or all of the following interventions:

Counselling:

Helping students to explore their thoughts and feelings and the choices open to them, giving care and support to students learning to cope with change in their growth and development. The Guidance Counsellor(s) may also be involved in helping students cope with bereavement, trauma, and loss in their lives and may also be called upon at times to liaise with other agencies in managing and dealing with ongoing medical issues.

Developmental Programmes:

The school Guidance Counsellor, in conjunction with the appropriate teachers and subject areas, facilitates and partakes in developmental programmes designed to help students with their personal, social and educational and vocational development.

Educational Development:

In Educational Development, the programmes include, study skills, exam techniques, subject choices, course choices, difference between levels of qualifications.

Vocational Development:

In Vocational Development, the programmes would include awareness of employment opportunities, courses and training and the development of job seeking skills.

Consultation:

The Guidance Counsellor may need to consult or seek advice from significant adults re the student - this consultation may be with subject teachers, Learning Support teacher, SPHE teachers, Pastoral Team, Year Heads, Class Tutors, Principal, Deputy Principal, parents/guardians, medical personnel.

These consultations must always recognise the primacy of the student's integrity and the need to maintain appropriate confidentiality.

Assessment:

The Guidance and Learning Support department administer standardised tests. Aptitude Tests and Interest Inventories can also help in decision making and planning for the future.

Information:

Information is an essential component of the school Guidance Counsellor's portfolio. The school Guidance Counsellor is involved with

- Information gathering
- Information organisation
- Information dissemination

The main function of the above is to provide as much information as possible on the widest range of options open to students. To this end, the school Guidance Counsellor needs to be familiar with

1. Pastoral structures and school administration, e.g. familiarity with the whole school body and its extensions into the community
2. The sources of useful information locally and nationally, e.g. relevant IT programmes, newspapers, referral agencies, etc.
3. Systems for acquiring, storing, and disseminating information, careers notice board, careers classroom, access to computer room.
4. Method of processing and using information for the student in an integrated way, i.e. making it clear, and student friendly.

The goal of the information service is to help the student in decision making processes, problem solving and with skills enhancement directed towards the ever changing circumstances of their development.

Classroom Guidance Activities:

Classroom Guidance Activities fall into three categories:

- Skill enhancement, e.g. decision making, job search, preparation for work placement and study skills
- Development Programmes, e.g. improving self-esteem, issues of concern to pupils.
- Information giving, e.g. education, training and employment opportunity awareness and pathways.

Referral:

Referral is, in essence, a two way process. The school Guidance Counsellor may refer and she in turn may be the recipient of referrals. Referrals of a student to the school Guidance Counsellor may be by self, other students, teachers, school management and parents. The voluntary participation of the referred student must be respected by all concerned. If, however, a student is referred and comes to the school Guidance Counsellor, their presence will be acknowledged and welcomed. The school Guidance Counsellor, in consultation with the relevant parties - parents/guardians, principal, relevant staff - may also refer a student to an external, appropriately qualified professional.

Protocol for Meetings

- (1) Meetings with students
 - (2) Meetings with parents/guardians
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- (1) All meetings are by appointment. Students make appointments with the Guidance Counsellor, who gives an appointment slip to the student who will then show it to the appropriate teacher when re-entering class. Subject teachers may ask that an appointment be rescheduled if it interferes with class teaching, assessments etc.
 - (2) Parents/Guardians make appointments with the Guidance Counsellor by telephoning the school. Appointments are usually conducted during the school day, but, may in certain circumstances be arranged after school. All parties are requested to inform each other if a cancellation is necessary. On occasion, the Guidance Counsellor may request another staff member e.g. Year Head, Learning Support Teacher, Subject teacher, or/and management to be present at the meeting. The student may be invited in for the whole or part of the meeting, if it is relevant, with the approval of Parents/Guardians

Preparation/Transitions:

The school Guidance Counsellor is involved in preparation for transitions with the students at different stages of the students' secondary education. These include:

- First year Induction Programme

- Students leaving school after |Junior Cert to take up apprenticeships, further training
- The Junior cycle student moving into Transition Year/Fifth year will need preparation regarding subject choice, subject levels and the importance and consequences of decision making now for their future.
- Leaving Certificate students - preparation for the actual leaving of school must now intensify. Information is the key factor in Sixth Year, along with one-to-one consultation.

The school Guidance Counsellor works in conjunction with the relevant team to successfully undertake the preparation for these transitions, e.g. parents, primary schools, Learning Support teachers, Pastoral Care Team, Year Heads, TY and LCVP co-ordinators, school management, employers and training agencies and Third Level institutions.

Confidentiality:

All students have a right to confidentiality in their dealings with the School Guidance Counsellor. This right is not universal, however. The following Confidentiality Statement has been agreed by the school:

While confidentiality between school counsellor, Learning support teacher, Year Head, Class Tutor, SPHE teacher, subject teacher and student is a very grey area and often, of its nature, limited, it should be possible to make the following contract with a student:

"Anything discussed between us is confidential, unless information is revealed which suggests there is risk to you or another person. In the case of reportage, you will always be consulted."

Ethical Requirements:

Ethical awareness is a prerequisite of the school Guidance Counsellor. He/She is obliged to operate, in policy, process and practice in an ethical manner. Her primary focus is the welfare of the student and she is ethically bound to act in the best interest of the student and must act within the law and within the ethical guidelines as outlined by her professional body. The Guidance counsellor(s) are expected to avail of supervision through the Institute of Guidance counsellors, if they are involved in regular personal counselling sessions with students.

Record Keeping:

Records of appointments should be kept and are intended to aid the school guidance counsellor's conduct of the sessions. Details of contacts with outside agencies should be recorded. It is recommended that personal records of all interviews be recorded. To ensure accuracy the Guidance Counsellor(s) should try to write up notes as soon as possible after each session. Records of personal counselling sessions should, if relevant, contain some of the actual words and phrases used by the client. Notes should be kept as brief as possible and should be kept securely in a filing cabinet in Guidance office.

Pastoral Procedures

The school has developed numerous pastoral strategies and procedures over the years. These are outlined in detail in the school's Pastoral Care policy. For the purposes of this policy the following points should be noted:

- In the area of information we are committed to respectfully and sensitively deal with how information is received, shared, stored and accessed.
- Our policy commitment to parents/guardians is to constantly work in partnership with them in order to achieve the optimum quality of relationship - this will require respect, listening, patience, willingness to reach consensus, creativity, co-operation and generosity.
- Dealing with sensitive issues such as sudden death and suicide also requires careful consideration. The school's Crisis Response Plan addresses these pertinent issues in greater detail, in particular the creation, when necessary, of a Crisis Response Team is essential. The effectiveness of this team will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Information for Students:

At the Open Night for incoming First Years the School Guidance counsellor gives an outline of the School Guidance Programme. At the beginning of the school year the Guidance Counsellor visits the First Year classes and introduces herself and explains her role. The Support Services in the school are also introduced to the First Year students in their SPHE classes.

Students are informed about the procedure of using a Guidance Slip to leave class for an appointment.

Information for Parents/Guardians:

At the Open Night for incoming First Years, the School Guidance Counsellor outlines the School Guidance Programme to the parents/guardians. They are also informed about a meeting for all First Year parents/guardians in October with the Year Head, Class Tutors, Learning Support teacher and Guidance Counsellor where any issues concerning their children are discussed.

Parents/guardians are welcome to come and visit the school Guidance Counsellor. It is best to make an appointment but all concerns from a parent/guardian will be accommodated quickly.

Information for Staff:

Information and new developments in guidance are to be shared with and made available to staff members. Bearing in mind the school Guidance Counsellor's obligation to confidentiality, she should make relevant information available to her colleagues.

Multi-cultural Guidance Counselling:

Multi-culture is now firmly a facet of modern school life. It should be recognised that multi-culture is not a narrow ethnic or racial band. Awareness of, acceptance of and willingness to learn more about different cultures helps the school guidance counsellor in her work.

Resources and Professional Development

The school is committed to providing the necessary resources to underpin the Guidance/Pastoral Care Policy. In particular, where possible, the school is committed to provide tailored development programmes for the guidance/pastoral teams. There will also be annual opportunities for the full staff to review the effectiveness of these roles and other guidance/pastoral issues.

Policy Monitoring and Evaluation

All our school policies require constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary

from time to time. In order that the tasks of monitoring and evaluation are effective, consideration of the following structures are proposed:

Monitoring

The Pastoral Team will monitor Guidance Policy implementation. They will prepare a short written report for the Board of Management, Principal and Staff. The report should examine the meeting of specific targets and timelines. The Board and Staff should set aside time to discuss any reactions, concerns or suggestions that may arise during the course of implementation. The Pastoral Care Team and the Principal/Deputy Principal will then meet to discuss the feedback and propose any adjustments necessary. Apart from the usual on-going monitoring that would occur with every area of policy, formal monitoring would be appropriate at least every second year.

The guidance Policy should be reviewed to see if

- The objectives of the Guidance policy are being met
- What factors facilitate or hinder that achievement
- To check what are the unmet needs
- How to cope with unmet outcomes
- To deal with new emerging target groups
- This process assists the school in forward planning so that the school Guidance/Pastoral programme remains relevant to the needs of the students.

Methods of Carrying out the Evaluation/Review

- Getting the views of the Pastoral Team
- Distributing questionnaires to students, parents/guardians/staff
- Collating these responses and presenting, following consultation with school management, a report to the Board of Management and Staff.

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