



Blackrock College

Guidance Policy

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Circular Letter No. PPT 12-05
Feature Days / Weeks

Chapter 1 Introduction

Rationale & Context

In October 2003, a document identified as M37/03 was sent by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education & Science to the Principal of Blackrock College, Mr. Alan MacGinty and it was duly passed on to the Counselling & Guidance Department in the College.

Document M37/03 refers to guidelines for second level schools on the implications of section 9(c) of the Education Act (1998), relating to student's access to appropriate guidance. M37/03 document is based on the report and recommendations of a committee set up by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), at the request of the Department of Education & Science.

The aims of the Mission Statement of Blackrock College particularly relevant to career guidance and counselling are;

1. ***"To create an environment which nurtures Faith, one which will provide students with an informed understanding of the Catholic Faith, but which also motivates them to live their lives in accordance with the Gospel values."***
2. ***"To provide a community environment in which each student can develop as a human person and a member of Christ's church."***
3. ***"To encourage each student to live his life as a responsible member of society, initially as a student, later as an adult citizen."***
4. ***"To prepare and equip each student for the pursuit of an appropriate career."***

The context for Guidance in Blackrock is that of a Faith school. Counselling is grounded in a Catholic understanding of the human person.

Section 9 (c) & (d) of the Education Act 1998 obliges schools to:

- (c) “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choice”.
- (d) “promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students”.

The vision and fundamental aims of Blackcock College Mission Statement are synonymous with the aims of the School Guidance Programme.

This policy on Guidance and Counselling has been drafted with referral to the College Mission Statement and with reference to the Education Act 1998.

Chapter 2 What is guidance?

The term “guidance” is synonymous with the terms “guidance counselling” and “guidance & counselling”. Guidance in a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence, designed to assist students to make choices about their lives and to make changes consequent on these choices. These choices may be categorised into four separate but interlinked areas:

- Moral and Spiritual
- Personal and Social
- Educational
- Career

Boarding School:

The College recognises that it has special responsibilities in relation to providing guidance for its boarding community, particularly those from overseas, whose parents may have little understanding of the Irish educational system.

Chapter 3 A whole school approach to guidance

A Whole School Approach to Guidance in Blackrock College refers to the role of the Board of Management, Principal, Deputy Principals, Director of Boarding, Chaplains, Deans, Counsellors, Additional Education Needs Department, Department Heads, Subject Teachers, Parents, Students, Past Pupils Union and the local community.

The nature and range of guidance activities are based on the premise that guidance is both;

- (i) a whole school concern;
- (ii) a specialist area within education, provided by the Counsellors, Chaplains, Additional Education Needs Department and Deans

The vision and fundamental aims of the Blackrock College Mission Statement are synonymous with the aims of the school guidance programme.

The Board of Management and School Management team have a responsibility to ensure that provision and practice of guidance in the school is of the highest standard.

The Dean of the year group plays a key role. He/She is the first point of contact between the home and the school. The Dean is responsible for classroom demeanour, interpersonal relationships, integration into school life, appropriateness of subject choice and the personal, social, moral and spiritual development of each pupil in his/her care. In the Boarding School these functions are carried out by the Director of Boarding, supported by the Housemaster of each year. This is achieved through:

- (1) a meeting in August, prior to the start of the school year, with each boy and his parents
- (2) daily interaction with each student
- (3) daily meetings with students in his/her care on an individual/group basis
- (4) weekly assemblies which provide information and guidance to the year group
- (5) the provision of a weekly report for parents. Yearmasters of boarders ensure parents are kept up to date with their son's progress.
- (6) liaison with the teachers of each pupil
- (7) support for, and co-operation with the pastoral programme
- (8) support for and co-operation with the guidance counsellors
- (9) availability to parents throughout the year.
- (10) referrals to qualified professionals both within the College and outside agencies.

Hours to fulfil this key role are sanctioned under Circular Letter No. PPT12/05 (Article 2.4)

Guidance Counsellors, because of their specialist training have a professional role in each of the main areas of guidance. However the Guidance Counsellor does not work in isolation. She/he depends on the help and support of colleagues on the school staff.

To this end, Counsellors liaise on a daily basis with the Dean of each year. Counsellors also liaise with pastoral care teachers, teachers in SEN, subject teachers and others where appropriate.

Those involved in **extra-curricular** activities, **pastoral care** and **chaplaincy** have a particular relationship with the student body and, with the Dean, play an important role in their personal, social, moral, spiritual and educational development. **Subject teachers** have a key role in providing support to students through information and advice relating to their subject disciplines and related careers. Individual teachers may be sought out by students on an informal basis for advice and information.

All staff members may consult with the Guidance Counsellor on the needs of an individual student and/or refer the student to the Guidance Counsellor when specialist competence is required with due regard to confidentiality. It is recognised that boarding school staff will play a crucial role in the holistic development of boarders and must be aware of their responsibilities to advise and encourage boys in their academic, emotional and moral development.

Parents have by far the most influence directly or indirectly on the choices made by their sons. Parents have a major influence on the environment in which the young person lives, including values, attitudes and lifestyle. Parents have an important part to play in helping to establish the needs and priorities of the school guidance programme and in supporting the programme. Parents can also participate in the guidance process through:

- Support for school ethos, mission statement and pastoral activities
- Attendance at relevant liturgies, information evenings and other meetings at school
- Consultation with guidance counsellor regarding provision of personal assistance to the school guidance programme i.e. guest speaker or interviewer.
- The Parents Association and Year Committees
- Contact with the Dean
- Boarding parents are welcome at all times. Facilities are made available for visits within the Castle. All boys have access to phone s and internet to stay in contact with their parents.

Students are the focus of the School Guidance Programme and are entitled to have an input into the development of the School Guidance Plan. In particular, students (through the student council) can help to identify and establish the priorities of the guidance programme. The boarders have a Council, which is representative of all year groups and international students, which meets fortnightly with the Director of Boarding.

The **Past Pupils Union** participate in the guidance process through:

- (i) support for school ethos, mission statement and pastoral activities
- (ii) provision of guest speakers
- (iii) involvement in career seminars
- (iv) involvement in “mock interviews”
- (v) provision of work shadowing experience

The Local Community participates through its agencies, organisations and institutions which provide young people with resources for spiritual and moral development, career exploration, information and other forms of assistance and support. Boarders are encouraged to participate in and explore their surroundings. outings are organised weekly. Boys may check out to access local shops , entertainment facilities and sporting or cultural organisations .

Chapter 4 Specific responsibilities of the Guidance Counsellor

The role of the Guidance Counsellor may be defined as the full range of interventions made to assist students make certain choices about their lives. In keeping with the ethos of the College these interventions are made on the understanding that each boy has been called by God to make a unique contribution to society.

An effective guidance service will involve the following activities; counselling, assessment, information, advice, record keeping by the Guidance Counsellor, educational, spiritual, moral, personal and social development, referral and specific career education and professional development and appraisal. Support in prayer may be appropriate to seek encouragement and discernment.

Guidance Counsellors are professionally trained to undertake the following tasks within the School Guidance Programme:

Counselling refers to helping students explore their thoughts, feelings and choices open to them. It involves giving care and support to students learning to cope with the many challenges of growing up. Group and individual counselling is to be encouraged to facilitate decision making, problem solving, behavioural change, attitude change etc.

Assessment refers to helping students obtain a better self-understanding through the use of psychometric tests and other inventories as well as school examination performance.

Information provides students with objective and factual data on educational and training opportunities as well as data on labour markets, information, entitlements etc. Information is an important first step in Guidance. The Guidance Counsellor needs to know; (a) the requirements of students, parents, teachers and school administration (b) the sources of useful information nationally and locally (c) systems for acquiring, storing and disseminating information.

Advice refers to making suggestions based on Guidance Counsellor's own professional and personal knowledge and experience.

Educational Development Programmes provide the transfer of knowledge and skills relating to study skills, examination performance as well as choice of subjects and levels.

Personal & Social Development programmes facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills relating to a student's moral, spiritual, personal and social development, self awareness, decision making and planning. The Pastoral Programme of the College facilitates the student's spiritual growth. Besides supporting the student's participation, the Counsellor may recommend initiatives to the Pastoral Department.

Referral includes two types of activity:

- (i) Referral of an individual student, who is challenged personally, socially, emotionally or educationally in the school environment to the Guidance Counsellor by teachers, school management or parents. A student is referred to the Counsellor as a matter of course on his return from an external suspension. Referral also takes place in the context of poor academic achievement in end-of-term examinations and consistently substandard weekly report cards.
- (ii) Referral of an individual student by the Guidance Counsellor to other qualified professionals inside/outside of school when a student is manifesting significant problems such as learning difficulties, substance abuse, bereavement, family or individual dysfunction, difficulties with faith or finding purpose in life. Procedure for referral is through Head of Department and after due consultation with parents.

The voluntary participation in counselling of the referred student must be respected by all concerned.

Specific Careers Education provides the necessary concepts, knowledge and skills to enable students to make the transition to higher or further education, training or work, including service in church ministry.

Placement refers to work experience and includes preparation of Curriculum Vitae and other data for employment.

Consultation with all who are education partners. The Guidance Counsellor's assistance may take the form of advocacy on the student's behalf, counselling advice and information. She/he engages in a two way process of consultation with parents, teachers, school management and referral agencies.

Networking refers to establishing links with employers, relevant agencies and institutions to enhance guidance work with students.

Promoting Change refers to assessing psychometric instruments, inventories and information booklets, which are in use and where appropriate to suggest change.

Monitoring & Review refers to making provision for ongoing monitoring and review. Seeking the views, comments and observations of students, teachers, parents and school management in formal and informal ways, can provide valuable information when reviewing, evaluating and planning the guidance service.

Life Long Learning refers to raising awareness of the importance and relevance of life long learning for all students.

Professional Development: The Guidance Counsellor should keep abreast of on-going changes in the fields of training, education, work and child welfare. School management should facilitate the attendance of the Guidance Counsellor at relevant events and at in-career professional training during the school year.

Evaluation

Self-Appraisal allows the Guidance Counsellor ascertain whether her/his start of year targets are achieved and to identify new targets for the following year.

Record Keeping refers to the comprehensive records of every personal interview, which the Guidance Counsellor has with a student. These records are then stored professionally and enable the counsellor to monitor the guidance programme.

Leaving Certificate Questionnaire

Carrying out a survey of the Leaving Certificate students is an effective way of helping the counsellor review her/his current Guidance Service and plan for the future.

Follow-up refers to following up past students regarding career progression routes, third level courses and other destinations. The information exchanged has benefits for counsellors and students.

Chapter 5 Structure of the Department of Guidance & Counselling

Structure of the Department of Guidance & Counselling

- (1). Head of Department
- (2). Guidance Counsellors in each Year
- (3). The Chaplains, while part of the Pastoral Team, is also a member of the Guidance and Counselling Department
- (4). SEN Department
- (5). Head of SPHE
- (6). Head of Pastoral Care

Key elements of the School Guidance Plan in Blackrock College.

The Education Act (1998) requires schools to develop a school plan based on the needs of the school. Since Blackrock College cares for and educates boys for five years from Second Year to Sixth Year, the Guidance Counsellors are assigned responsibility for individual year groups.

First Year of secondary school for our student body is spent in Willow Park. While there, the boys take Drumcondra Level IV/V attainment tests and the AH4 as well as further individual tests when necessary.

Guidance for second and third year students takes the form of counselling and growth of self awareness. Before a student can seriously consider a third level course of education, he must first come to know his strengths, interests and abilities. The Counselling Department aims to empower the student to maximise his ability and his unique talent. Individual difference is acknowledged and appreciated. The students are strongly encouraged to work hard at their studies and to become involved in the School Pastoral Programme and Extra-Curricular Activities, whether they are in sport, music, drama or debating. Becoming involved enhances a young man's sense of belonging to the school. Isolation and social withdrawal of any student is monitored and intervention follows.

The Counsellors in each year meet each student individually and/or in groups at least twice each year. In Second and Third year the duration of the average individual interview is fifteen minutes whereas in Fourth to Sixth year the average duration is 30 minutes.

The main focus of the counselling interview is:

- (i) To ascertain whether a student is happy at school, socialises well, is involved and recognises the spiritual dimension of his life
- (ii) To explore friendship and network of friends in the students' life in school especially at lunchtime and immediately after school. Weekend routine and use of free time is also discussed with the students.
- (iii) To teach each student how to study and to encourage him to study in a regular and suitable place using a study plan and timetable
- (iv) To encourage each student to get involved in an extra curricular activity suitable to his interest and ability. It is important to monitor this involvement on a term basis because a student may occasionally opt out of involvement after initial enthusiasm.
- (v) To ascertain that subjects and level of subjects taken by each student to suit that student's ability. It was also considered very important to monitor the achievement of each student in end of term exams at Christmas and Easter. If a discrepancy occurs between ability and achievement then the matter is addressed.

The above activities ensure that the spiritual, moral, academic, social, psychological and emotional development of the students is monitored.

Students' need for further counselling/help varies a great deal. Boys who are coping well with good family support require little help. Others have serious coping problems. These problems arise from all kinds of social, family and personal conditions. Problems of coping present themselves to the counsellor in three principal areas:

- 1) Academic performance which does not match ability.
- 2) Disruptive or antisocial behaviour inside or outside the classroom.
- 3) Problems of anxiety, depression or any form of stress from whatever cause.

The Counsellor's role is one of talking through with the students whatever appears to impede his performance or cause him distress. Through discussion, consultation, prayer and advice, it is the counsellor's aim to provide moral support to clarify the issues involved and help the student to learn better coping techniques, so that he becomes happier with himself and capable of achieving according to his ability.

Where problems are acute, the co-operation of parents may be needed or referral to the Chaplain or outside professional care may be required.

New students to each year are identified and interviewed individually first.

In term three, Third Year Parents are addressed by the Head of Department and presented with a booklet which gives comprehensive analysis of subject choice for the Leaving Certificate. This booklet is compiled and updated each year by the Head of Department after consultation with the Department Heads. Individual help regarding subject choice and support is given at this time to students and/or their parents by telephone, email or by personal interview. Initial subject selection for the purposes of sampling and understanding are made. At the end of Transition Year students complete the 'Subject Choice' form for the senior cycle.

Differential Aptitude Tests are administered to all 1st Year students and feedback is given to the students orally and in written form to the parents. Transition Year, Fifth and Sixth Year students receive similar counselling opportunities to those available to Second and Third Year students as well as Career Interviews.

Counsellors address students in each year group informing them of all the activities, aims and objectives for their particular year. The Blackrock College Careers Programme begins formally in Transition Year. This programme is supported by the Blackrock College Past Pupils Union and the Parent body.

It includes:

- Transition Year Module in Guidance
- Career talks and other lectures of interest during Transition Year.
- Work Experience Programme for Transition Year students, two weeks, one in February and one in May.
- Evening Seminars for Fifth Year Parents in September/October.

- Career Guidance talks for Fifth & Sixth Year students on Saturday mornings in January.
- CAO meetings for Parents and boys in November of 6th Year.
- Career Interviews for Sixth Year students in February.

For Fifth Year Parents the Head of Department organises Evening Seminars, which address career choice and higher/further educational options in a general way. Guest speakers and past students are invited to contribute. In preparation for the seminars, brochures, letters and invitations are sent to parents and guest speakers. Small gifts are purchased for speakers.

Head of Department prepares a comprehensive career pack each year which contains valuable information for parents and students regarding preparation for career choice, open days, Colleges of higher/further education, UCAS, CAO, SAT's and deadline dates. A questionnaire is given to parents and students following the seminars. A calendar of career information is prepared for all students in fifth year and sixth year.

A Career Project is assigned to each Fifth Year student. Individual and group interviews continue throughout the year. The students are encouraged to use Qualifax and to begin individual research using the computer. Open days at universities, other colleges and vocational workshops can be attended.

In 6th Year, the focus is on preparing the boys for the completion of the C.A.O form. An explanatory meeting is held for the 6th Year Parents in November. This is followed up with an Assembly for the boys. The Year Counsellors also meets the boys on a one to one basis.

Each Sixth Year student formulates an individual career plan with the help and support of the Guidance Counsellor. Important elements of that plan include the following:

- ◇ The student's Fifth Year career investigation
- ◇ The student's evaluation and learning outcome of his Work Experience
- ◇ The student's interests and abilities as identified on Centigrade and C.A.T
- ◇ The student's individual interests and extra-curricular activities as identified through self-awareness and discussion
- ◇ The student's values (i.e. his understanding of the meaning of success) and expectations of the world of work
- ◇ The student's individual characteristics and personality

- ◇ The student's skills and abilities, which are manifested in school work
- ◇ The student's commitment to work in hand

When all these factors are discussed, a particular career path begins to emerge, which facilitates a clearer choice of course, at Third Level education.

In January Career Talks are held for Fifth and Sixth Year students. Topics such as the following are discussed by past pupils in these career areas;

Tourism/Hotel Management	Entrepreneurship
Law/Solicitor/Barrister	Advertising & Marketing
Computer Studies/Information Technology	Quantity Surveying/Auctioneering
Defence Forces/Gardai	Medicine/Dentistry/Pharmacy
	Ordained and Lay Ministry
Bank & Investment	
Engineering/Architecture	
Media/Communication	
Accountancy/Taxation	

In the final term the Centigrade Career Questionnaire is administered to all Fifth Years.

In Sixth Year, Centigrade Career Profile is presented to each Sixth Year. Targets for the year are set. Individual calendar of career events is prepared and distributed in September.

- Higher Options is attended by all students
- Information on Oxbridge and medical application through UCAS paper and electronic explained and distributed
- BMAT is administered
- Information and application for S.A.T.'s distributed.
- Other UCAS forms explained and applications made.
- Interview preparation for U.C.A.S. Colleges.
- CAO forms explained and distributed.
- Useful website addresses distributed.
- Visiting lecturers from universities and other colleges address Sixth Year students.
- Sixth Year students attend Open Days DCU, TCD, NCI, DIT etc.
- A growing number of past students given Career Interviews.
- Follow-up letter sent to immediate past students.

- C.A.O. Seminar for parents of Sixth Year students.
- PLC College applications explained.
- A Clinical and non-clinical Career Day at St. Vincent's University Hospital.
- Achievement in individual subjects analysed and appropriate advise given.
- Study techniques and timetable examined and monitored. Study programme, revision systems, time management and examinations discussed.
- Interviews given to Parents when requested.
- Careers Notice Board, Forthcoming Events/Open Days
- Career Library
- C.V. preparation and letters of application made prior to Mock Interviews.
- Feedback, oral and written given to students in days after interviews.
- Mock interviews for all Sixth Year students.
- Students with learning difficulties assessed and special submissions made through CAO for special consideration in the Leaving Certificate and access to third level education.
- Past students given interviews regarding difficulties with College courses.
- On a daily basis response made to phone calls and emails (time taken up to 45 mins).
- Career agenda for the following year planned through meetings etc.
- Advise given to parents and students in days and weeks following Leaving Cert results in August and re CAO offers/PLC advice etc.
- Transition to third level.
- Grants, scholarship costs and budgeting.
- A file is created and maintained on each student in the College. In this file counsellors keep a record of in house and public examination results as well as all objective assessments administered in the College. A record of all interviews is kept as required.
- Department meetings are held regularly and the Guidance Plan is constantly being reviewed and updated.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This School Policy for Blackrock College is based on the needs of the students, parents and school staff. The Guidance Service offered by the Pastoral Team, Deans, Guidance & Counselling Department and S.E.N. Department in Blackrock College is a very comprehensive and professional one, which services the students and their parents very well.

Within the College the partners in education work well together. Colleagues are supportive of the guidance programme and contribute very valuable information and advice regarding students.

Parents' Committees are supportive through networking with each other when counsellors seek further co-operation from students i.e. application for "mock interviews" and in liaising with counsellors regarding appropriate information sessions. Talks suitable to the stage of development of their sons are organised for parents in each Year group by the respective Year Committees and for the Parents Council.

CPD is encouraged by the School Management. Membership of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors is funded.

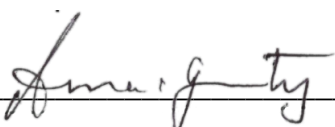
The Past Pupils' Union support the Guidance Programme through their involvement in planning seminars through on-going meetings and the provision of guest speakers and interviewers throughout the academic year.

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management on 4.09.18

Signed:


Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed:


Secretary, Board of Management

Appendix

Appendix 1

[Circular Letter No. PPT 12/05](#)

Appendix 2

[Blackrock College Feature Days/Weeks](#)