

Guidance Plan
Mercy Secondary School,
Kilbeggan,
Co. Westmeath



Section 1: Aims of the Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, Guidance Plan

1.1 Introduction

This plan endeavours to incorporate the Continuum of Support Model for the Whole School Guidance Programme. It tries to meet the needs of students along a continuum, from a whole school approach to group and individualised approaches. The continuum model can be used in Guidance under the following headings:

- Guidance for All
- Guidance for Some
- Guidance for a Few

Guidance Counselling and Guidance and Counselling 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 transitions to these choices. The choices may be categorised into three distinct but interlinked areas:

- Personal and Social
- Educational
- Career

Guidance activities that assist students to make informed choices include

- Personal counselling
- Assessment using psychometric instruments and inventories
- Career information e.g. (career classes, personal vocational guidance interviews, attendance at career events, visiting speakers from Higher Education Institutes)
- Use of information technology, e.g. Qualifax, Careers Portal
- Personal and social developmental programmes

Counselling is a key part of a school guidance programme, offered on an individual basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crises. Counselling may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.

1.2 School Philosophy and Mission Statement

Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, is a catholic co-educational school committed to the holistic education of all students, to ensure that individually, they each realise their full potential in a social and physical environment that is caring, supportive and joyful.

In achieving this, the Guidance Counsellor plays an important part in the areas of counselling and guidance as well as involvement in the pastoral care of students.

1.3 The Aims of the Guidance Counselling Service

Rationale

Guidance is a universal entitlement for all students in post primary schools as per the Education Act (1998). This Act also requires schools to provide students with 'appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices' (Section 9c). The Education Act also requires schools to prepare a school plan (Section 21)

The Guidance Counselling Service is seen as having a central role in the in the continuous developmental guidance process of each individual student, which begins prior to the entry of the student to the school and concludes when the student has left the school

Guidance

- To deal with students in an eclectic and multicultural manner in order to aid them in developing their full potential.
- Provide a framework for the delivery of the school's guidance programme
- To ensure a structured response to students' personal, social educational and career guidance needs
- The plan includes the guidance provisions for junior, senior, minority and special education needs of all students

The plan will detail all guidance activities:

- Career classes
- Vocational Guidance
- Attendance at Career Exhibitions
- Open Days
- Meeting with Management

- Support Agencies

To provide a caring and supportive service, this shall have three components:

1. Personal and Social
2. Educational
3. Vocational

Personal and Social: This would encompass developmental skills crucial to the students' education and future careers, e.g. self-awareness, decision making skills, planning and coping strategies.

Educational: This is developmental and would include such areas as subject choices, subject level, motivation and learning, study skills, learning related problems and psychometric testing.

Vocational: This area includes areas such as employment rights and duties, job opportunities, vocational education and training, further education, job and interview preparation, career research and career/course information.

Counselling

To provide a counselling environment; this would be both caring and non-judgemental on a one-to-one or group basis. This service would be aimed at helping students in areas such as:

- Decision Making
- Problem Solving
- Changing Behaviours
- Effect meaningful changes in their lives

This counselling service is aimed at facilitating individual students in a holistic manner to realistically appraise their abilities, interests and aptitudes in order to make appropriate life choices and to achieve personal happiness.

Objectives

- Develop awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities
- Identify and explore opportunities

- Grow in independence and take responsibility for themselves
- Make informed choices about their lives and follow through on these choices

Scope

The Guidance Plan involves all aspects of school life and as such it is a whole school activity. While the Guidance Counsellor has the overall responsibility for co-ordinating the plan, all members of staff have a contribution to make.

The Guidance Counsellor is a member of the school educational team and as such works with various members of that team to provide students with the best possible service.

Members of this team include among others:

- School Management
- Year Heads
- Tutors
- Subject teachers and Departments
- Learning Support Coordinator
- Transition Year Coordinator
- Parents
- School Maintenance Staff
- Support Personnel

The Guidance Plan is a reflection of this teamwork.

The School Management and Guidance Counsellor, as part of their roles within the school, may liaise with outside agencies such as:

- Department of Education and Science
- Local Community
- Business
- Garda Liaison Officers
- Employment Agencies
- Feeder Schools
- Health Service Executive
- Referral Agencies
- Social Services

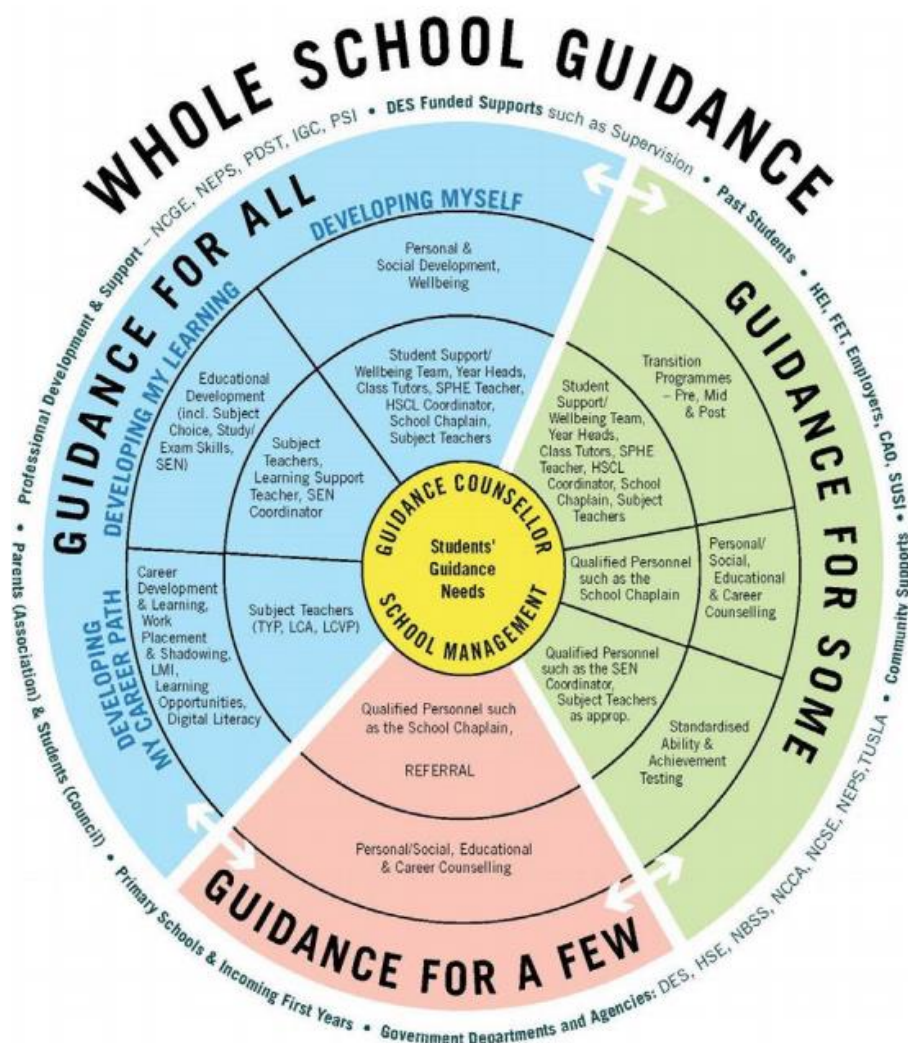
1 A continuum of Support A continuum of support model is applied to the Mercy Secondary School Guidance programme. In applying the continuum, our whole school guidance programme aims to meet the needs of students along a varied range, from a whole school approach to group and individualised approaches. The continuum model can be applied as follows:

A) Guidance For All – provided to all students to support personal & social, educational, and career development, and students making transitions (incoming first years, junior cycle to senior cycle and from senior cycle into apprenticeships, FET, HE and employment). The guidance counsellor as the specialist has a key role to play in coordinating the planning and delivery of the whole school guidance programme and in the provision of guidance to students. A whole school approach is employed in delivering the learning and teaching activities of the school guidance programme which include, career education programmes, SPHE and Wellbeing in Junior Cycle, guidance modules and work experience/placement provided as part of senior cycle programmes (TY and LCVP).

B) Guidance For Some – provided to specific groups of students to support personal & social, educational and career development and transition making. Such groups of students will typically include, for example, students in senior cycle, especially 6th year, who will benefit from group and one-to-one guidance counselling to support educational and career decision making, and students who are making transitions. Transition points include, primary school into first year of post-primary education, Junior cycle to Senior cycle, and school to higher/further education and training, apprenticeships and employment. Some students may require additional and more intensive support in making transitions. Group/one-to-one guidance counselling will require the expertise of specialist school staff, such as the guidance counsellor working in collaboration with the pastoral care team, SPHE teacher, SEN Coordinator, year heads, class tutors and the school Chaplain.

C) Guidance for a Few - Students may require support in meeting their developmental needs and when they experience personal crises. Some students may also require more intensive support as they make transitions (including transitions for Early School Leavers (ESL) and to education centres such as Youthreach) and important decisions during their time in post-primary schools. This support will require the expertise of specialised school staff with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to respond to the needs of these students and

will involve the guidance counsellor, and other school staff who have been trained in meeting the needs of vulnerable students and those who may have additional needs. In the event that the student requires more intensive support, referral to external agencies and supports should be employed. In the event of a protracted referral the guidance counsellor/Chaplain/ staff member may need to provide continued support to the student. The figure below (courtesy of NCGE: A Whole School Guidance Framework, Page 14) shows the continuum of support model on which our School approach to guidance is offered. The guidance counsellor in collaboration with school management and staff, and external organisations/personnel, deliver a wide range of activities and learning to support students' personal & social, educational and career development. The guidance counsellor as the specialist plays a central role in the design and delivery of the whole school guidance programme.



Section 2 – Current Guidance Provision and Programme

Part 1 Current Guidance Provision

The Guidance Counsellor is full time associated with the provision of Guidance in the school.

Junior Cycle

'The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) provides for a new area of learning at junior cycle called Wellbeing. Wellbeing will cross the three years of junior cycle and build on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' wellbeing.' 'The introduction of Wellbeing into the Junior Certificate in September 2017 recognises the association between the quality of relationships between teachers and students and a number of student outcomes, including socio-emotional wellbeing, engagement in schoolwork, feeling a sense of belonging in school, levels of disciplinary problems, and academic achievement. The focus is on the role of the school guidance programme in supporting the wellbeing of all students in junior cycle.'

NCCA (2017) Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, www.ncca.ie

Provision for First Year Students

Annual Open Night: This allows potential students the opportunity to look around and experience the atmosphere of the school. Teachers and students are available to answer questions and give information regarding subjects and supports. This night takes place in November.

Incoming First Years sit an entrance test in January/February. This is a useful indicator of a student's ability and identifies high achievers as well as those who may require additional support.

Incoming First Years with SEN, or those who are particularly anxious, can come into the school in May to tour the school under less crowded conditions than can be present on Open Night. This helps to ease the transition from primary school.

An Information Evening for parents of incoming first year students takes place in August. Parents are given practical information about the running of the school and how to prepare for secondary school.

First Year Induction occurs on the first day of term. Students meet with Year Head in the morning and take a tour of the school in small groups. Then they meet their class tutor & the Guidance Counsellor. Journals are distributed and the school Code of Conduct is explained. The 6th Year Mentors organise games and ice-breaker activities for the students.

Students take part in two-week option subject taster courses to try all subject options in first year. This allows them to make informed choices regarding their subject choices for Junior Certificate. After ten weeks of taster courses, they then choose their option.

All classes have one class period of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) / Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) per week.

- All classes have two hours of Physical Education (PE) per week.
- All classes have one class period of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) per week.
- They also have one class of computers a week. This is known as digital literacy.
- Students are encouraged to become active members of the school community through the wide range of extracurricular activities.
- Parent-Teacher meetings for first year students are scheduled
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department
- A group of sixth year students act as student mentors to each first year tutor class. They support students who are finding it difficult to settle in. They organise a bonding trip for the first years in the first term.
- The Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, class tutors and the Guidance Counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Students can avail of **counselling** with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the Guidance Counsellor, or parents and the Guidance Counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.
- **Referrals** to outside agencies are made when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.

- **Assemblies** are conducted every month to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.
- **Wellbeing week** is a week where activities are arranged to highlight the benefits of positive mental health.
- **The Students' Council** includes first year students who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.

Provision for 2nd Year Students

Second year students are encouraged to become autonomous members of the school community.

- Students are encouraged to become active members of the school community through the extensive range of extracurricular activities.
- All classes have one period of SPHE/RSE per week.
- All classes have a double period of PE per week.
- All classes have one class period of CSPE per week.
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department.
- Parent teacher meetings for second year students are scheduled.
- Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, class tutors and the guidance counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Students can avail of counselling with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the Guidance counsellor and parents and the Guidance Counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.
- Students can also avail of counselling with a psychotherapist who is on the staff or an outside psychotherapist who comes into the school on a Friday. This is usually arranged through the Guidance Counsellor.

- Referrals to outside agencies are made when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.

Assemblies are conducted on a regular basis to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.

- The Students' Council includes second year students who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.

Wellbeing week is a week where activities are arranged to highlight the benefits of positive mental health.

Provision for Third Year Students

Students are encouraged to remain active members of the school community.

- A strong emphasis is put on reaching one's potential.
- Students are encouraged to become active members of the school community through the extensive range of extracurricular activities.
- All classes have one period of SPHE/RSE per week.
- All classes have 2 hours of PE per week.
- All classes have one class period of CSPE per week.
- Parent teacher meetings for third year students are scheduled.
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department.
- The Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, class tutors and the Guidance Counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Students can avail of counselling with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the guidance counsellor and parents and the guidance counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.

- Referrals to outside agencies are made and when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.
- Junior Cert Examination Special Accommodations are processed by the SEN Department. The Guidance Counsellor processes the applications for students applying to RACE under the Physical Grounds section.
- Third year students are introduced to the Senior Cycle programme and Subject options. These include Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and the option of LCVP. An information booklet which has been prepared by the Guidance Counsellor with a lot of input from the subject teachers is given to each 3rd year student to help them make an informed choice around subjects.
- The Guidance Counsellor provides a module to 3rd year students through which she informs students of all the relevant information that will assist them in making an informed decision on their options after the Leaving Certificate.
- An Evening presentation is provided for parents.
- Students have a choice either to go into fifth year or to apply to Transition Year. The majority of third year students go into Transition Year.
- Assemblies are conducted on a regular basis to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.
- Students' Council includes third years who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.

Wellbeing week is a week where activities are arranged to highlight the benefits of positive mental health.

Senior Cycle

The aims of the Guidance Counselling programme are:

- to help students to develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities
- to explore possibilities and opportunities open to them
- to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves

- to make informed choices about their lives and to follow through on those choices.

The Guidance Counselling programme at senior cycle aims to assist the full development of each student's potential, to help students grow in self-knowledge and self-esteem and to prepare him for higher or further education, training and/or employment.

Objectives:

Guidance Counselling should endeavour to provide students with opportunities to:

- Prepare to manage their successful transition from second level to further or higher education, training or employment.
- Identify their own key motivating factors.
- Prepare for the successful transition into adulthood.
- Learn about jobs search and job retention skills.
- Develop research and Information Technology skills so that they can be self-directed in their career exploration and development.
- Learn about the world of work, including employment rights and responsibilities.
- Develop skills to become independent and self-motivated learners.

Provision for Transition Year Students

To assist students in making the transition from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate, the following is in place. It is a sample of the many and varied activities which our students are actively encouraged to engage with throughout the year:

- T. Y. induction day
- Bonding trip
- Class tutor/Year Head
- Work experience
- Folder of excellence, certificates of merit, distinction and participation
- Report at the end of year
- Credit system
- Leaving Certificate subject information module
- Subject tasters in class

- Work Experience
- Life Skills
- CV/cover letters
- Business - enterprise and mini company
- Student Enterprise Awards
- Many educational visits
- Gaisce
- Numerous guest speakers on topics deemed suited to the group
- RSA Road Safety Day
- Debating
- Junk Kouture

As with other year groups:

- All classes have a triple period of PE per week.
- Assemblies are held on a regular basis to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.
- Students' Council includes Transition Year students who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.
- Parent teacher meetings for Transition Year students are scheduled.
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department.
- The Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, form teachers and the guidance counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the Guidance Counsellor and parents and the Guidance Counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.
 - Transition Year students receive a module on Career Guidance. This usually happens around the time when subject choice is on the horizon for them. They become very familiar with all the ICT resources that are available from a career perspective.

- An Evening presentation is provided for parents.
- Students can avail of counselling with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Referrals to outside agencies are made and when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.

The Students' Council includes Transition Year students who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.

Provision for Fifth Year students

- In fifth year, students have a choice of traditional Leaving Certificate, or traditional Leaving Cert with LCVP.
- There is one hour class of LCVP in fifth year.
- LCVP students have one week's work experience.
- Parent teacher meetings for fifth year students are scheduled.
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department.
- The Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, form teachers and the Guidance Counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the guidance counsellor and parents and the guidance counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.
- Students can avail of counselling with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Referrals to outside agencies are made when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.
- Assemblies are conducted regularly to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.

- Students Council includes fifth years who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.

Wellbeing week is a week where activities are arranged to highlight the benefits of positive mental health.

5th Year students receive a one hour career guidance class a week for approximately half the year.

Provision for Sixth Year students

- There is a strong emphasis on each student achieving their potential.
- All classes have one period of Guidance per week.
- The Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, form teachers and the guidance counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Learning or emotional issues which arise are dealt with through the School Pastoral Care System; which includes tutors, year heads, the Care Team, the Guidance Counsellor and the SEN Department.
- A Parent teacher meeting for sixth year students is scheduled.
- Year Head liaises with parents, subject teachers, form teachers and the guidance counsellor to address any issues of concern.
- Individual meetings are held between students and the guidance counsellor and parents and the guidance counsellor on request. These can be in relation to personal, educational or career matters.
- Students can avail of counselling with the Guidance Counsellor by referral from a teacher, parent or by self-referral.
- Referrals to outside agencies are made when the school resources and expertise are exhausted in dealing with particular issues.
- Assemblies are held regularly to reinforce positive behaviour, to reflect on our school ethos, to provide positive feedback to year groups and highlight all the activities which take place for that year group.

Wellbeing week is a week where activities are arranged to highlight the benefits of positive mental health.

- A group of sixth year students act as student mentors to each first year tutor class. They support students who are finding it difficult to

settle in. They meet with the classes on a weekly basis and offer help and advice.

- Students' Council includes sixth years who take part in many aspects of school life and represent the views of the students, as well as organise school events.
- All sixth Year students attend the Higher Options Exhibition.
- Students have one-to-one career planning meetings with the Guidance Counsellor. Appointments are distributed during class. It is the aim of the Guidance service to ensure that each sixth year student receives a minimum of one guidance appointment with the Guidance Counsellor. If a student requires more time, another appointment can be organised by arrangement with the Guidance Counsellor.
- Visiting speakers are invited in throughout the year. These are generally from Higher Education Institutes (HEI) or Colleges of Further Education (CFE). They may be general information talks on the specific HEI or they may be subject specific, depending on the needs of the year group.
- Students are encouraged to attend Open Days on Saturdays to ensure students do not miss class time.

Provision for EAL Students

The Guidance Counsellor meets with any EAL student who is new to the school. Some of these students will have come from very troubled war torn countries and the Guidance Counsellor needs to be sensitive to their situation and special and unique needs that they may require. This will include researching their educational background and any qualifications they may have sat in their home country. The Guidance Counsellor will advise these students of their further education entitlements moving on from second level, depending on where they are in the school system.

Provision for Students with Additional Needs

In Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, we are proud to have our Autism Class. The Guidance Counsellor meets with the Learning Support Co-Ordinator and Autism Class Co-Ordinator to be briefed on these students. This is especially important as they come to 6th Year to ensure that they will have continuity in their educational pathway. The Vocational Guidance Service liaises with us each year and any student

who is due to complete their 2nd level education has a meeting with this service and a plan is put in place for these students during the course of the year.

Students who may be withdrawn from Careers class for Learning Support in 5th and 6th year are kept up to date on class content by way of communication through Google Classroom. They will also meet the Guidance Counsellor for a 1-1 appointment.

Part 2 Current Guidance Programme

Introduction

The Guidance Curriculum may be divided into two components:

Formal

Informal

Formal Guidance

The Formal Guidance curriculum is delivered using two forms of intervention employing a number of methodologies:

1. Individual contact of careers/vocational guidance
2. Classroom guidance delivered in regular weekly classes to senior cycle students.

Informal Guidance

The informal Guidance programme consists of liaising with other teaching staff/management to promote cross curricular links and to enhance the development of a whole school policy in relation to the delivery of The Guidance Plan. Meetings with Parents/Guardians form an integral part of informal guidance.

Junior Cycle

First Year: Guidance programme is delivered through SPHE class

Second Year: Guidance programme is delivered through SPHE class

Third Year: Guidance Counsellor delivers a module of Career Guidance for the students. This ensures that third years are fully informed about the options that will be available to them after third year, i.e. Transition Year/Subject choice for 5th

year as well as dealing with all the other modules of the SPHE programme.

Senior Cycle

Aims:

The aim of the Guidance Counselling Programme is to help students to develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities;

- to explore possibilities and opportunities open to them;
- to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves;
- to make informed choices about their lives and to follow through on those choices.

The Guidance Programme at senior cycle aims to assist the full development of each student's potential, to help the student grow in self-knowledge and self-esteem and to prepare him/her for higher or further education, training and/or employment.

Objectives

- The Guidance Counsellor shall endeavour to provide students with opportunities to:
- Prepare to manage their successful transition from second level to further or higher education or employment
- Identify their own key motivating factors
- Prepare for successful transition into adulthood
- Learn about job search and job retention skills, research and ICT skills, so that they can be self-directed in their career exploration and development.
- Learn about the world of work, including employment rights and responsibilities
- Develop awareness of the need for lifelong learning
- Develop skills to become independent and self-motivated learners

Contents of the Guidance Programme

| | | | |
|----|--|--|---|
| 1 | Self-Assessment | Career Interest Interest Tests Personality Career Values | Guidance Counsellor |
| 2 | CAT 4 | Cognitive Ability Tests and analysis of results to enable informative feedback for students | Guidance Counsellor |
| 3 | Career Profile | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 4 | Relating Profile to Career | Abilities Interests Aptitudes Strengths Weaknesses | Guidance Counsellor |
| 5 | Personality | | Guidance Counsellor/SPHE |
| 6 | What options are available | | Guidance Counsellor/Subject Teacher |
| 7 | How the Education system and FETAC work | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 8 | The different forms of Third Level Education | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 9 | Open Days | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 10 | Challenges to living and learning | | Guidance Counsellor/SPHE |
| 11 | Social and Community | E.g. Issues, Bullying, Suicide, Depression, Illegal Substances | SPHE/Guidance Counsellor |
| 12 | Grants | Information | Guidance Counsellor |
| 13 | Study Skills and Exam Preparation | | Subject Teacher/Guidance Counsellor |
| 14 | Interview Preparation | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 15 | Higher Options | | Guidance Counsellor |
| 16 | CAO and UCAS system | Information | Guidance Counsellor |

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|---------------------|
| 17 | HEAR and DARE schemes | | Guidance Counsellor |
|----|-----------------------|--|---------------------|

Section 3 Current Guidance Procedures Subject Choice Procedures

Subject Choices have to be taken on two different occasions

Junior Cycle

Entry to First Year

| Core Subjects | Choice Subjects |
|--|--|
| Mathematics English Irish Science Religion CSPE SPHE P.E. | German French History Geography Home Economics Art Music Materials Technology Wood Metalwork Home Economics Business Studies |

Incoming First Years take all core subjects and after a taster program they choose between French or German and also between History & Geography. Their final two subjects are picked from a two line option scenario. In Transition Year, students take a wide variety of subjects to give them the best possible learning experience in this year.

Senior Cycle

Students study three core subjects and choose 4 optional subjects. Qualifying students will also take LCVP as part of their Leaving Certificate. This choice is generally made in March/April.

| Core Subject | Optional Subjects |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Mathematics English Irish | French German Biology Chemistry Physics Engineering |

| | |
|--|---|
| | Design and Communication Graphics Business Accounting Construction Studies Home Economics History Geography Art Agricultural Science Music Accounting Applied Maths Physical Education |
|--|---|

The optional subjects can vary from year to year according to demand and available resources. The Guidance Counsellor provides help and support at each stage of the decision making process and is available to all students for advice and guidance at this important time in their educational lives.

Counselling and Student Appointments

Students make appointments with the Guidance Counsellor for a variety of reasons which may include careers, information or for personal reasons. Each student is entitled to 'adequate guidance' under the Education Act 1998. This will vary from student to student with some students requiring more time than others.

Career Appointments

Priority for Career appointments is given to 6th Year students. Appointments for 5th, TY and 3rd years are scheduled from February onwards as much as time allows.

Arranging Appointments

The Education Act 1998 states that a school shall use its resources to...'Section 9(c) .. ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.'

To this end, each student is encouraged in developing his/her full potential in making a career choice that reflects their goals. The school will support the students through this process. Career appointments are made by the students with the guidance counsellor. The student is

given an appointment slip which must be given to their teacher before attending the careers office. The majority of students in 6th year attend the Guidance Counsellor for advice on their choices for 3rd level. This may include advice on CAO choices or PLC courses.

Confidentiality

A professional relationship involving confidentiality is at the core of guidance counselling. The Guidance Counsellor takes all reasonable steps to ensure that consultation with students takes place in an appropriately private environment.

The Guidance Counsellor will take all reasonable steps to preserve the confidentiality of information about students obtained in the course of professional work. They reveal such information only with the students' consent, but with certain exceptions, which include: where concealment would result in danger to the student or others; when required by the Law or designated guidelines; or for purposes of professional consultation or supervision.

It is the responsibility of the Guidance Counsellor to inform each student about their legal limits on confidentiality.

The Guidance Counsellor will discuss information about students only for professional purposes and only with those who are clearly entitled to be consulted. Written and oral reports contain only such data as are pertinent to the case and every effort will be made to avoid undue invasion of the students' privacy.

The Guidance Counsellor will publish oral or written information about students only with their written consent or where the identity of individuals or groups is adequately disguised.

Subject to the law, the Guidance Counsellor will take all reasonable steps to safeguard the storage, retrieval and disposal of students' records, both written and electronic.

The Guidance Counsellor will take all reasonable steps to ensure that colleagues, the Principal and others with whom they work understand and respect the need for confidentiality.

Reasonable Accommodation

Occasionally a student may require special consideration in the State Examinations.

Such special considerations may take the form of

Written Examinations

Arrangements to have question papers read to the candidate. The questions may be read as often as the candidate requires. No elaboration or explanation may be given.

Modified question papers may be supplied substituting alternative questions for those which refer to visual material such as diagrams, photographs and maps.

Braille translations of question papers may be provided, following any necessary modification.

Question papers may be provided in enlarged print.

Candidates may be permitted to record their answers on tape recorder, Type-writer or word-processor.

Answers may be dictated to a person acting as a scribe rather than to a tape recorder. This arrangement may be approved where the candidate's speech would be extremely difficult to interpret on tape or where a tape recording would not meet the particular requirements of the examination, e.g. making calculations in such subjects as Maths and Accounting.

Ten minutes extra time per scheduled hour of each question paper may be allowed where the candidate needs the help of a scribe or would otherwise be unable to make adequate use of the mechanical aids provided for recording the answers.

Oral and Aural Examinations

In the case of oral examinations, school authorities are requested to liaise with examiners with regard to candidates who have special needs. The arrangements for aural examinations vary according to degree of deafness and are as follows:

The candidate may remain in the main centre but sit close to the tape recorder.

The candidate may remain in the main centre and be allowed to use a personal stereo player with personal induction loop. An additional tape of the questions will be provided in such circumstances.

The candidate may be allowed to sit in a separate room and listen to a CD player either with or without headphones.

The selection and application procedure for such students begins in first year. Any psychological assessment reports for incoming First year students are referred to the Special Needs co-ordinator who has responsibility for this area. The Guidance Counsellor looks after RACE applications for students under the *Physical Grounds* section

Assessment Procedure

A range of assessment tools are used in the Guidance Programme to supplement academic and teacher reports.

Assessment of Incoming First Year Students

Currently the assessment test is administered by the Guidance Counsellor as part of the entrance assessment that incoming First Year students are asked to take. The test gives the school an indication of the strengths and weaknesses of incoming students in the area of verbal and numerical reasoning and perceptual understanding.

The Cognitive Abilities Test 4 is the test used. In addition to this, the principal visits all feeder schools prior to the new students entering, this will also help to identify students that may have special needs.

Third Years

In February of Third Year, third year students are tested using the Differential Aptitude Test for Guidance in order to see what their aptitude is for certain subjects. The *Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT)* is a suite of tests that assesses a student's reasoning (thinking) abilities in key areas that support educational development and academic attainment.

The CATs cover:

- Verbal Reasoning Battery – thinking with words- Verbal Classification & Verbal Analogies
- Quantitative (or Numerical) Reasoning Battery – thinking with numbers - Number Analogies & Number Series
- Non-verbal Reasoning Battery – thinking with shapes - Figure Classification & Figure Matrices
- Spatial Ability Battery – thinking with shape and space - Figure Analysis & Figure Recognition

Senior Years

Interest based tests are used to see what level of interest a student would have in a particular career or course.

Personality tests are used to allow the students to gain more self-knowledge.

Speakers

It is normal for speakers from individual colleges to give talks to 6th year class groups. These talks are both informative and useful as they give the students an overview of the courses that are available in different colleges and they give the overview of third level education.

Records

The Guidance Counsellor shall keep such records as relate to his/her role. Records are kept both electronically on the Guidance Counsellor's laptop, which are password protected. Paper records are kept on students' in a locked filing cabinet in the Guidance Counsellor's office, which is locked at all times when unoccupied. The files are kept for five years after the student has left school. All files are kept in accordance with The Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act.

Open Days

6th Year Students

As part of the Careers programme in the school, 6th year students are encouraged to attend Open Days, that are organised by third level institutions. In order, to minimise disruption to school life, students are encouraged to attend Open Days that are organised at weekends. Only 6th years attend Open Days. Open Days allow students to form a better picture of what is involved in further education and of what life as a third level student is like.

Students dropping a subject/changing subject level

A student may be referred to the Guidance Counsellor in the event of that student wishing to drop a subject, to ensure they understand the implications, if any, of their actions. Equally in the event of a change of level in a subject, the student may come to the Guidance Counsellor for advice and guidance. The Guidance Counsellor may consult with the relevant subject teacher.

Study Skills Programme

The Guidance Counsellor will deliver a study skills programme to students in 3rd – 6th year. Study skills will be covered in SPHE in 1st and 2nd year.

Section 4 Current Policies related to Guidance

| Policy Name |
|--|
| Admissions |
| Child Protection Policy and Guidelines |
| Assessment |
| Anti-Bullying |
| Homework |
| School Trips |
| ICT and Internet Permission |
| Dealing with Bereavement |
| SPHE |
| Attendance |
| Substance Abuse |
| Data Protection |
| Special Needs |

The guidance Plan should be read in conjunction with these policies.

Special Educational Needs Policy

Internet Usage Policy

SPHE Policy

Anti-Bullying Policy

Code of Behaviour Policy

Child Protection Policy

Section 5 Current Resources

Guidance Counsellor's Office and classroom

Phone

Locked filing cabinet

Laptop networked to the main school network

Notice Board outside careers office

Use of computer room for class and resources

Careers Library in Guidance Counsellor's office

Materials

The careers library contains Irish and UK prospectuses as well as career related publications. All books can be borrowed from the Guidance Counsellor.

Section 6 The Role of the Guidance Counsellor

Name of Guidance Counsellor: Ms. Jennifer McArdle

Qualifications: B. Sc., H. Dip. Ed., H.Dip. CG

In Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, the Guidance Counsellor is professionally trained to undertake the following tasks within the school guidance programme.

Counselling:

Empowering students to make decisions, solve problems, change behaviours and resolve issues in their lives. Such activity may be educational counselling, career counselling, and to a much lesser degree, personal counselling, due to time allocation constraints. Counselling is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis.

Counselling on an individual basis is part of the support structure that the school provides to students. Within the overall time allocated for guidance, adequate time is given for the educational and career counselling function in the guidance programme.

The rationale for the time allocated and its usage is evident in the school guidance plan.

See the Department of Education and Science

Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act (1998), relating to students' access to appropriate guidance.

Support:

The Guidance Counsellor provides support to students, parents, teachers, the Principal, Board of Management and referral agencies in assisting the personal, social, career and educational development of students. Such support may include advocacy on behalf of a student. Support also refers to assistance in the planning and development of the SPHE programme, Transition Year Programme, guidance related activities.

Assessment:

The Guidance Counsellor is trained to use a range of psychometric tests and other evaluative instruments to support relevant objectives of the school guidance programme. Such objectives may be related to career and educational planning, personal decision making and development of self-awareness.

Information:

Assisting students to acquire, interpret and use information relevant to their personal and social, educational and career development.

Classroom Guidance Activities:

Providing classroom based learning experiences that are relevant to the objectives of the school guidance programme. Such experiences may include information giving, information and communication technologies (ICT), developmental skills (e.g. planning, decision-making, study skills, communication, values clarification), and vocational preparation.

Planning and Organising Workplace Learning:

This is normally done in Transition Year and organized by the Transition Year Coordinator.

Referrals:

Seeking for students the assistance of non-school based professionals following standard procedures, e.g. NEPS.

The guidance counsellor also provides support for students referred to him/her by teachers, parents, and school management. The voluntary participation by the individual concerned is respected in these situations.

Professional Development:

The guidance counsellor should keep abreast of on-going changes in the fields of training, education, work and child welfare. The Board of Management and school management should facilitate the attendance of the guidance counsellor at relevant events and at in-career professional training during the school year. Participation in these events should be related to the objectives of the school guidance programme.

Attendance at non-school based events should be negotiated/agreed in advance between the Board of Management, school management and the guidance counsellor.

Guidance Activities that Assist Students to make Transitions include:

Careers education/career transition programmes

Enabling students to make transitions to further and higher education, training and employment

Placement

Work experience, work shadowing, and preparing students for employment.

Transition Work placements are organized by the Transition Year Co-ordinator.

Follow-up

Following up former students regarding progression routes and destinations

Consultation

With parents, school staff and students

Feedback

Giving feedback to the Board of Management, school management and staff on the needs of individual students, groups and the school as an organisation, and how the school guidance programme has supported students' choices and transitions.

Networking

Establishing links with employers, relevant agencies and institutions to enhance guidance work with students.

Promoting change

Assisting curriculum development in the school

Managing, Organising and Co-ordinating

It is the Guidance Counsellor's role to organize the guidance activities into a coherent programme in conjunction with the management and staff of the school. The nature and range of guidance activities as outlined above are based on the premise that guidance is both a whole school concern and a specialist area within education.

Evaluation

As part of this role the Guidance Counsellor will constantly review the programme to ensure it is meeting the demands of the students and their parents.

Section 7 References

Reference has been made to the following documents:

1. Codes of Ethics of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors
2. Freedom of Information Act
3. Data Protection Act/General Data Protection Regulations
4. Education Act 1998 Section 9 and Section 21
5. Department of Education and Science guidelines on the implication of Section 9 of the Education Act on Guidance
6. Guidance Provision in Second Level School (Circular Letter No. PPT 12/05)
7. Guidelines on the Practice of Guidance and Counselling in Schools (NCGE 1996)

Section 8 Abbreviations

GC Guidance Counsellor

CAT Cognitive Assessment Test

SEN Special Educational Needs

RACE Reasonable Accommodations Certificate Examinations

Digitalised Whole School Guidance Plan

Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

Introduction to Digitalised Guidance

This resource outlines the decisions made at local school level about the logistics of digitalised / online school guidance provision in our school when needed.

All content was discussed and agreed between School Management and the School Guidance Counsellor(s). The approach to digitalised Guidance in our school is documented here in line with:

A Whole School Guidance Framework document (NCGE, 2017)

<https://www.ncge.ie/resource/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework>

(Covid-19) Support information for Guidance Counsellors in Schools (NCGE, 2020)

<https://www.ncge.ie/resource/covid-19-ncge-support-information-GC-schools>

Continuity of Guidance Counselling - Guidelines for schools providing online support for students (DES, 2020)

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/Policies/continuity-of-guidance-counselling-guidelines-for-schools-providing-online-support-for-students.pdf>

Continuity of Schooling (DES, 2020)

www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html

Digitalised Guidance is provided in our school in line with the continuum of support model (NCGE, 2017 p12): Guidance for a Few, Guidance for Some, Guidance for All. This resource outlines the provision of digitalised guidance in line with that continuum. The first section outlines the logistical approach for 'Guidance for a Few,' a second section notes the approach for 'Guidance for Some', and the third section refers to 'Guidance for All.' In addition, a final section outlines how our school will coordinate Whole School Guidance, should the school have to close for part of the year or if some staff must self-isolate.

Guidance for a Few:

In Mercy, Kilbeggan ALL students will have access to one-to-one supports from teachers, support teams and the Guidance Counsellor, where appropriate.

Parents / Guardians will be informed that these services are available by:

School Website and Letter communication to parents via school website

In Mercy, Kilbeggan we agree to undertake our '**Guidance for a Few**' (one-to-one sessions) as follows:

| | |
|---|--|
| Platform Used: | Google Meet |
| How and when students may be contacted: | A schedule of virtual meetings should be planned with students by email during a limited time frame (e.g. following the 'normal' local school timetable, 9am-4pm). |
| Contact with parents may arise when: | A Child Protection issue arises. |
| Students are identified as needing one-to-one support through several school processes: | <p><u>Self-Referral</u> – students may self-refer by sending an email to the Guidance Counsellor. Students are notified about how to connect with the guidance counsellor at the beginning of the school year and in bi-weekly assemblies.</p> <p><u>Student support team</u>: Teachers are aware they can contact the student support team by email if they are concerned about a student. The student support team will then take appropriate action which may include referral to the Guidance Counsellor.</p> <p><u>Parents</u>: If parents are concerned for their children, they may contact the year head.</p> <p><u>Other Avenues</u>: We will monitor the other means through which students are referred this year and will add those means to this document for future years.</p> |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Frequency of Contact: | The agreed procedures to facilitate students to be notified of their initial appointment in advance in Mercy, Kilbeggan is <i>through school email</i> Further contact will be agreed with students as appropriate towards the end of each meeting. |
| Session Length: | Each one-to-one meeting would not exceed the duration of normal appointment or lesson times, except in the event of an emergency. |
| Contract: | A contract will be made with students at the beginning of the one-to one sessions as it would have been in a 'face to face' situation (this can be done verbally or in writing depending on original school policy). Included in this contract, it will be noted that neither party will record or take photographs of the session. Students and parents are informed that a record of the session will be kept by the Guidance Counsellor, in line with normal professional practice and the school's 'Confidentiality Policy.' |
| DLP and DDLP: | If digitalised guidance is taking place, our school procedures for communication with the DLP and the DDLP are by phone call or email. If an emergency/child protection issue arises during a time when digitalised guidance is taking place, the agreed protocol is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Take accurate notes of child protection issue/disclosure ✚ Contact DLP or DDLP |
| Communication with management: | The Guidance Counsellor will communicate with management on a regular basis & immediately if a Child Protection issue arises. |
| Record Keeping & GDPR: | The Guidance Counsellor keeps digital records on a password protected PC/laptop and all files relating to students are also password protected. |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Logistics | The Guidance Counsellor will ask the student where they are at the time of the meeting and make a note of it e.g. are students at home / in a friend's house / with a relation etc. This is done to ensure students are in a safe and appropriate environment. In addition, if a child protection or safety issue arises, Guidance Counsellors will know where the students are. |
| | |

Guidance for Some:

In Mercy, Kilbeggan digitalised 'Guidance for Some' will operate in line with our schools 'Remote Learning Policy' as follows:

Students will have full school days online, following their normal timetable including PE, CSPE, SPHE, Ethical Education and Guidance. Additional information evenings (eg. CAO Information Meeting) will take place virtually where deemed necessary/possible. Senior students will be kept up to date on any Guidance related content by way of both Google Classroom and their school emails. Students can email Career Guidance queries to the Guidance Counsellor or additional 1:1 career guidance meetings can be scheduled via Google Meet.

Guidance for All:

In Mercy, Kilbeggan digitalised 'Guidance for All' will operate in line with our schools 'Remote Learning Policy' including:
Timetabled Guidance/SPHE/Vocational Preparation continue online.
Option for all students to self-refer for personal counselling if needed.

Coordination of Whole School Guidance:

This section describes how the school approaches the management and coordination of whole school guidance if a blended/digitalised approach must be undertaken in our school.

The Guidance Counsellor will update school management weekly to discuss digital Guidance. Any Child Protection issues that arise will be made known to the DLP/DDLP via phone or email. The Care Team will continue to meet remotely when necessary.