

**Guidance Plan**

**Mercy Secondary School,**

**Kilbeggan,**

**Co. Westmeath**



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

### **1.1 Introduction**

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. However, due to a lack of resources and time allocation, personal counselling is only offered on a minimalist basis.

### **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

#### **1.3.1 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:

-  SPHE Programme
-  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.

### **1.3.2 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

### 1.5 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
- + Special Needs 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

## **Section 2 – Current Guidance Provision and Programme**

### **Part 1 Current Guidance Provision**

The Guidance Counsellor has approximately 11 hours of Guidance each week. She is also a subject teacher at both Junior and Senior Level.

#### **2.1.1 Junior Cycle**

The Guidance Programme in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year is delivered through the SPHE programme.

In 3<sup>rd</sup> Year, the Guidance Counsellor delivers the SPHE Program. This allows students to have class contact time with the Guidance Counsellor and it also enables her to go through important areas of the SPHE programme in this vital year. This includes giving information and support with the important choices that have to be made towards the end of third year, i.e. Transition Year/Subject Choice for 5<sup>th</sup> year.

#### **2.1.2 Senior Cycle**

Transition Year students receive one class of career guidance a week. They attend the Higher Options conference in September of each year. They become very familiar with all the ICT resources that are available from a career perspective.

5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Year students are timetabled for one careers class per week. Each 6<sup>th</sup> year student also receives a career appointment with the Guidance Counsellor.

### **Part 2 Current Guidance Programme**

#### **2.2.1 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.

### **2.2.1 Junior Cycle**

First Year Guidance programme is delivered through SPHE class

Second Year Guidance programme is delivered through SPHE class

Third Year Guidance Counsellor takes all third years for SPHE class. 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 5<sup>th</sup> year as well as dealing with all the other modules of the SPHE programme.

### **2.2.2 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 Programme

1	Self-Assessment	Career Interest Interest Tests Personality Career Values	Guidance Counsellor
2	DATS	Differential Aptitude Testing and Analysis Analysis of Career	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		Guidance Counsellor

	Preparation		
15	Higher Options		Guidance Counsellor
16	CAO and UCAS system		Guidance Counsellor

## Section 3 Current Guidance Procedures

### 3.1 Subject Choice Procedures

Subject Choices have to be taken on two different occasions

#### 3.1.1 Junior Cycle

Entry to First Year

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

Incoming First Years take all core subjects and choose THREE optional subjects, the optional subjects are arranged on three different lines and the students pick one subject from each line.

In Transition Year, students take wide variety of subjects to give them the best possible learning experience in this year.

#### 3.1.2 Senior Cycle

Students study three core subjects and choose 3 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 Construction Studies Home Economics History Geography Art Agricultural Science Music

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.

### **3.2 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.

#### **3.2.1 Career Appointments**

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

### **3.2.2 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 6<sup>th</sup> year attend the Guidance Counsellor for advice on their choices for 3<sup>rd</sup> level. This may include advice on CAO choices or PLC courses.

### **3.3 Confidentiality**

**3.3.1** 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.

**3.3.2** 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.

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

**3.3.4** 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.

**3.3.5** 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.

**3.3.6** 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.

**3.3.7** 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.

### **3.4 Reasonable Accommodation**

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

Such special considerations may take the form of

#### **3.4.1 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, typewriter 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.

### **3.4.2 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 tape recorder 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.

## **3.5 Assessment Procedure**

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

### **3.5.1 Assessment of Incoming First Year Students.**

Currently the assessment test is administered by the Guidance Counsellor as part of the entrance test 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 3 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.

### **3.5.2 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. This information can be used as an aid to students with regard to how well they can do in certain types of work. The DATs cover:

- + Verbal Reasoning - understanding of the written word
- + Numerical Reasoning - basic strength with regard to numbers
- + Abstract Ability - making connections
- + Spatial Ability - Visualize in 3D
- + Mechanical Ability - ability in regard to things mechanical and technical
- + Accuracy - The ability process information quickly and accurately

### **3.5.3 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.

### **3.5.4 Speakers**

It is normal for speakers from individual colleges to give talks to 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **3.6 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.

### **3.7 Open Days**

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Year Students**

As part of the *Careers* programme in the school, 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **3.8 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.

### **3.9 Study Skills Programme**

The *Guidance Counsellor* will deliver a study skills programme to students in 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> year. Study skills will be covered in *SPHE* in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

## **Section 4      Current Policies related to Guidance**

<b>Policy Name</b>
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.

## **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.

### **6.1. 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.*

### **6.2. 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.

### **6.3. 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.

### **6.4. Information:**

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

### **6.5. 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.

### **6.6. Planning and Organising Workplace Learning:**

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

### **6.7. 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.

### **6.8. 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.

**6.9. 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

**6.10. Placement**

Work experience, work shadowing, and preparing students for employment. Transition Work placements are organized by the Transition Year Co-ordinator.

**6.11. Follow-up**

Following up former students regarding progression routes and destinations

**6.12. Consultation**

With parents, school staff and students

**6.13. 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.

**6.14. Networking**

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

**6.15. Promoting change**

Assisting curriculum development in the school

**6.16. 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.

### **6.17. 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
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)

Signed: *Paul Daly*  
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: **7<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

Signed: *Garrett Farrell*  
Principal/Secretary to the Board  
of Management

Date : **7<sup>th</sup> November 2024**