

NCGE Briefing Document

School Guidance Review & Development Plan Initiative

Summary Report (1997-2000)

INTRODUCTION

This Briefing Document gives an overview of the background, activities, pilot project and outcomes of School Guidance Review and Development Planning, a project initiated in 1997 by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). Its aim is to inform partners in education about the nature of this project and of its benefits to schools. The project is reported on under the following headings:

- Background
- The School Guidance Review Pilot Project 1999-2000
- Pilot Project Outcomes
- Advice on Project Implementation from the Pilot Schools
- General Comments on Guidance in Schools Arising from the Project
- Actions by the Participating Schools Arising from the Project
- Ownership of the School Guidance Plan
- Links with the Whole School Planning Initiative

BACKGROUND

In 1996 the Department of Education and Science published “Guidelines for the Practice of Guidance and Counselling in Schools” to assist school management and principals to manage and develop school guidance programmes. The Guidelines outlined the various roles and responsibilities of school staff, school management, and of the Department of Education and Science in the delivery of a school’s guidance programme. They highlighted the need for a partnership approach to the development of a school’s guidance programme, based on review, needs assessment, and planning.

A key part of strategy to implement the partnership approach was the development of in-service training for school principals and guidance counsellors. An Advisory Committee with representation from the ACS, IVEA, JMB, ASTI, TUI, IGC and the Department of Education Science was convened by the Department’s agency, the National Centre for Guidance in Education. This committee developed a methodology and materials for implementing the partnership approach.

The methodology consisted of seven activities:

1. Presentation of the guidance programme review and development planning initiative to school staff.
2. Identification of student guidance needs that are being met by the school.
3. Identification of resources that the school has for the guidance programme.
4. Identification of student guidance needs that are not being met by the school.
5. Summarising the results of the previous activities.
6. Seeking observations of school staff on the summary.
7. Development of a school plan to improve guidance provision and the adoption of the plan by school management.

The materials developed to support these activities included:

- Guidance and Counselling in Post-Primary Schools (1999) – an explanatory guide for school management and staff.
- An introductory flyer for school staff.
- Overhead transparencies for presentation of the activities.
- Speaking notes for the transparencies.
- An activities booklet with details of the review methodology.

The material can be viewed on the NCGE website.

THE SCHOOL GUIDANCE REVIEW PILOT PROJECT 1999-2000

The Advisory Committee decided to test the methodology and materials by means of a pilot project funded by the Department. The pilot project took place in nine schools nationwide – 3 voluntary secondary, 3 community, and 3 VEC schools, and ran from September 1999 to May 2000.

Two national training days were provided to the school principals and guidance counsellors concerned. The first was a Familiarisation Day (September 1999) in which participants learned the review methodology, familiarised themselves with the materials, and planned the project in their schools. The second day (December 1999) focused on sharing their experiences to date of the methodology and materials. During the intervening period NCGE provided support visits to each of the schools. An Interim Report on the project was provided to the Department in February 2000. NCGE undertook a follow up study on the project in May 2000. The outcomes of this study are presented next.

PILOT PROJECT OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the pilot project are summarised from the perspective/self reports of the major participants – principal, staff, guidance counsellor. Changes in attitudes, behaviours, roles, understanding and ideas are also described.

Perspectives of Project Participants:

(i) School Principals

- The project helped schools to discover deficiencies in current guidance provision.
- Principals became aware of some problem areas and student needs for the first time.

(ii) School Staff

- The project led to a greater understanding and awareness of the multi-faceted role of the guidance counsellor.
- Many teachers realised for the first time that some of their work with students is considered “guidance” and that they have a role to play in the school guidance programme.
- There was an increased appreciation of the huge work load in a school’s guidance programme and that a guidance counsellor’s work involves a lot more than CAO.

(iii) Guidance Counsellors

- Most guidance counsellors felt that the project gave them a greater understanding of their own role and of the guidance related work of other staff.
- Many remarked that the support provided to the project by the principal was vital to its success.

Changes in Attitudes to Guidance:

- Some principals reported a greater understanding of the personal and educational guidance aspects of the guidance counsellor’s work.
- Some guidance counsellors now see themselves as more facilitators of career learning experiences than “spoonfeeders”.
- School staff are more positively disposed to guidance provision and more cognisant of its breadth and depth.

Changes in Guidance Role Behaviour:

- Principals use the guidance counsellor as a source of advice and referral for students with personal problems.
- Some staff use the guidance counsellor similarly. They also participate in guidance activities with parents.
- Guidance counsellors regularly inform staff of what they do, and undertake more record keeping.
- In schools where students were surveyed about their guidance needs, more self-referral to the guidance counsellor and the care team was reported.
- Improved facilities for the guidance counsellor e.g. office, careers library, access to computer room, hardware and software, were reported.

Changes in Understanding and Ideas about Guidance:

- Principals became cognisant of a huge need for more individual and group guidance, more counselling support, and of more time to be officially allocated to guidance in schools.
- Staff have a clearer understanding of guidance and of their guidance role.

ADVICE ON PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION FROM THE PILOT SCHOOLS

- Time needs to be found in the school timetable to get a complete picture of the guidance needs of all pupils. Where such is not possible, the guidance review should focus on one or two key year groups, especially sixth year.
- The on-going support and monitoring of the project by NCGE staff was valuable and vital to the success of the project.
- Involving students in the review greatly enriched the outcome, drawing attention to student issues that most school staff were unaware of.
- The two in-service training days were a key to the success of the project.
- The writing up requirements were daunting: some of the forms could be further simplified as could the vocabulary of the support materials.
- The project required many hours work outside of the school timetable in order for it to be successfully carried out.
- School staff need to be freed up from class to allow adequate time for discussion and reflection in small groups.
- The timetable for the pilot project - the first school term – was unrealistic. The activity envisaged requires a much longer time frame.
- The production of a video on the guidance review – rationale and methodology – would greatly assist initial presentation of the review to school staff.
- More full staff meetings should be worked into the review rather just beginning and end activities.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON GUIDANCE IN SCHOOLS ARISING FROM THE PROJECT EXPERIENCE

- The need to change the ratio of pupils to guidance counsellor. One principal stated that the findings from the project in his school made for “frightening reading”. The range of unmet guidance needs was overwhelming.
- Guidance counsellors felt that because the service is under resourced, the service provided reflects badly on them. Students and parents feel hard done by and attribute the shortcomings of the service to the guidance counsellor. Despite working at full capacity, there was a growing realisation and sense of despair among guidance counsellors that they would never be on top of their job.
- There is an acute need for more back up services e.g. NEPS, especially in rural areas. Working through the Health Boards is very bureaucratic and with long delays.
- There is a need to spell out to school principals what can be realistically expected of the guidance counsellor in the limited time provided for a guidance service.
- Schools need planning time to undertake work of a review nature.
- School visits are a sure way of getting feedback on the project. Questionnaires sent by post are not.

ACTIONS BY PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS ARISING FROM THE PROJECT

- The review and development activities will be repeated in the next two years.
- More hours to be allocated to guidance activities.
- Improved subject choice support and provision.
- The development and implementation of anti-bullying measures.
- In-service for staff on listening skills.
- Development of staff handbook and parent handbook.
- The provision of preventative and awareness seminars to students e.g. health education, in response to the project findings.
- The school guidance plan has been presented to school staff.

OWNERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL GUIDANCE PLAN

- The majority of schools had not presented the plan to school management.
- All guidance counsellors and the majority of school principals and staffs felt ownership of the plan.

LINKS WITH THE WHOLE SCHOOL PLANNING INITIATIVE

The project and its activities are complementary to the Whole School Planning Initiative (WSP). The WSP provides the framework for describing and reporting on school's policies, procedures, and activities. The School Guidance Review and Development Plan is a very focused activity and will usefully serve as supplementary material to WSP, giving the basis for its description of school guidance policy. There has been regular communication between WSP and the School Guidance Review and Development Plan Initiative. WSP has been represented on the School Guidance Review Advisory Committee since 1999.