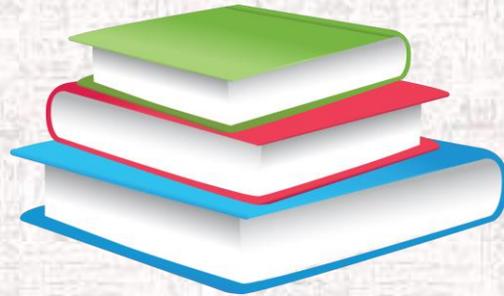


‘The student’s voice in evidence informed guidance practise in the school’.

A specific perspective from a voluntary all girl secondary school based in a town north of Cork city.

What characterises Guidance Practise in a non DEIS Voluntary School?



- Unique in that it is mainly self reliant
- Anticipatory
- Resourceful
- Flexible, even with diminished resources
- Accepting that hard and difficult decisions have to be made and respectful that there are limits to what the school can do.

Feedback methodology

- Student's perspective from surveys, discussions in class, student's own requests for change or specific support or information at intervals.
- Comments they make during class exercises are a rich source of feedback.
- Individual feedback from counselling sessions and one-to-one vocational appointments.

Whose voice? Which students?



Those who have class contact.	Those who have individual contact.
Those who have class contact and individual contact.	Those who have no class or individual contact.

Which section of the student population gives feedback?

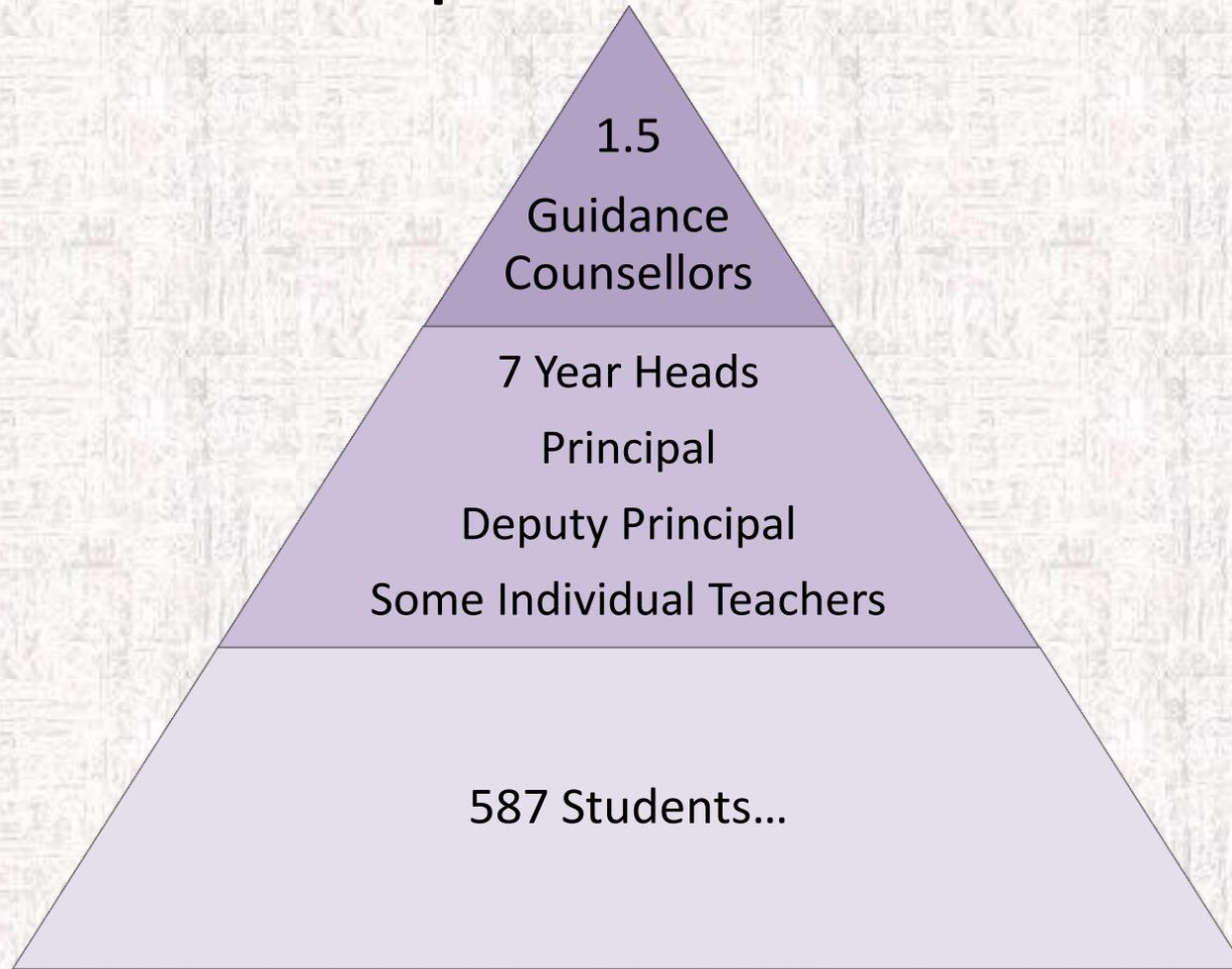
- Usually feedback is received from classes or individuals that the Guidance Counsellor have contact time with.
- This feedback varies from year to year as we do not have much continuity with any group and there are groups in the school that we have no contact with at all as Guidance Counsellors.

What kind of information do we look for?



- The student's experience of the Guidance programme.
- Their experiences of visits in and out.
- Their concerns wrt social and health related issues.
- Availability of a staff member when they perceive they need support and what the quality of that experience was.
- Careers and subject related issues they believe need to be addressed.

Ratio of teachers involved in guidance practice



Guidance vs counselling do they perceive a difference?

Guidance

Guidance is information and discussion driven. Its focused on research and assignments. It can be both general and then it can be very narrow when you have no interest in the topic.



Counselling

Counselling is 'where there is space to say what's in your head, your view on things not other people's. A space to sort out what you think and feel, in confidence without fear of others getting to hear about it (unless it's dangerous).'



Reports from Junior Cycle students survey done in SPHE class

Perception of School Guidance:

- They try to help you with problems such as school stuff like settling in, bullying, not being able to keep up with work, subject choices. They try to guide you to the right options.
- I don't know.



Feedback on their Awareness of the Guidance Counsellors and access to individual sessions

- 'I only knew there was a sign on the door not much else until my Mum told me a bit more about it'
- Students only go to the GC 'when they can't sort issues out themselves and don't want family to know'.
- Students fear that GC will 'tell you what to do and won't listen'. See them as 'cross parents'.
- Students think GCs are for 'big' problems like family bereavements not 'small' problems like a breakdown in relationships at home.

Reports from senior level students during a Careers class in 5th year

Perception of School Guidance:

- Someone who helps you when you have problems in school and outside of school.
- A person you can trust and turn to.
- A teacher who researches and does everything possible to make it easier to make big decisions for college.
- A teacher who can direct you to applications and help with personal statements/interview preparation.
- A member of the staff who lets you speak what's in your head even when they don't agree.
- A system that helps you feel confident.

It's hard to explain but you'd know if it wasn't there.

Usefulness of a Guidance Counsellor in second level

- In the classroom they have researched vocational information about courses after the junior cert, subject choices etc. so you can trust them.
- One to one or small groups more personal and social issues they have been trained to manage them and don't get easily upset or flustered.
- You don't have to be afraid of what you tell them as they are trained in loads of stuff.
- They will always do their best to help you.

Summary and Conclusion from the student's voices

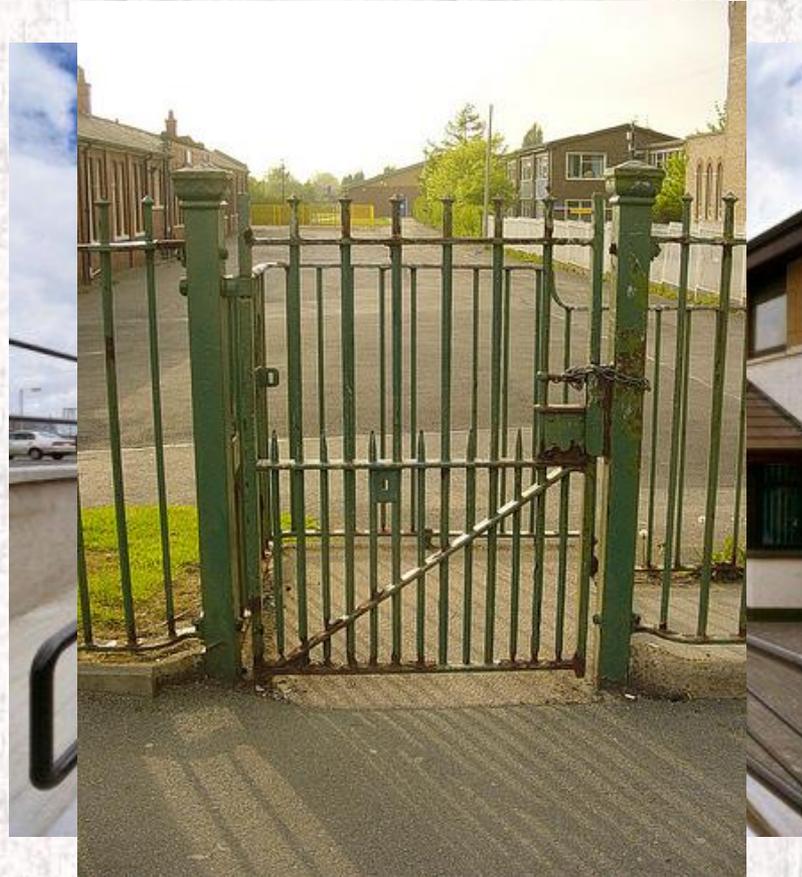
- Guidance is mental and practical first aid with vocational themes. Teachers in Guidance are first and second responders to student's issues and concerns and need to be trustworthy and trained. It doesn't suit all teachers.
- 'You obviously need someone in a school who is always free and available to deal with crisis'.
- GCs should not be in exam subject class..... as you need them to be free to respond to students as the need arises not wait for appointments next week if the matter is important and urgent.

Summary and Conclusion from the student's voices

- The most useful thing about Guidance personnel is there is someone who will listen to you even if it's only for 5 minutes on the corridor.
- There should be more teachers to support you in school.
- It should be easier to meet the Guidance Counsellor.
- Contact with the Guidance Counsellor should start in 2nd year and there should be more time given to individual prescribed interviews.

When did I start putting a value on what students say

- 1982.
- 1997.
- 2005.



What did work – what influenced Guidance Practice in St. Mary's

- 1998 access to Junior school students.
- 2006 more individual contact time with Junior and Senior students.
- 2012 awareness of the impact of change in Government policy and how access to students compromised subject teaching groups. Larger class sizes to allow GC to be available to meet students.
- 2014/5 class time with 14 different groups this academic year
6 senior weekly (161) 8 junior every 2nd or 3rd week (135).
- 2015/6 ?
- 2017.....

What didn't /doesn't work

- Request not to have class time in 6th year. Disastrous.
- Intermittent talks with the Junior cycle students.
- More speakers.
- More visits out.
- Access to IT when we didn't use Reach+.
- Challenges in the class room.
- Not being familiar with your audience.
- Poor relationship with students themselves and conflict of roles e.g. being a Year Head or subject teacher in a very academic school.

What I've learnt

- The practice of Guidance depends on the ethos of the school and the Principal's interpretation of the practise.
- For Guidance to be effective it needs whole school support and not risk sabotage from persons who do not understand the relationship between guidance and good mental health blended with academic success.
- Some input from students is useful, however their voice must be seen within multiple contexts and how they might influence guidance practise has to weighed up carefully before implementation.
- Without some student input the Guidance practice is less effective.

Thank You.