



St. Columba's College

Guidance Plan & Policy

Updated December 2025, next due for review December 2026

Person Responsible for updating policy: Guidance Counsellor

Introduction

The school guidance plan is a structured document that describes the school guidance programme and specifies how the guidance needs of pupils of St. Columba's College are to be addressed. It is an integral part of the school's overall school development plan, with a whole school approach at its core.

Guidance Team

Career Education Counsellors

Mr. Humphrey Jones, BScEd, PGDipGC (Guidance, Psychometrics & CAO Applications)

Mr. Michael O'Shaughnessy, MA (UCAS Coordinator)

Mr Tristan Clarke, BA, HDipEd (UCAS Personal Statements)

School Counsellor

Mrs. Sonia Owen, BSc (Nursing), RGN (Guidance), DIP (Counselling).

Ms Antoinette Aherne Breslin, DIP (Counselling) IACP & WGII Accredited (External)



Note: In addition to the above, the Guidance Planning Team also includes Ms A Maybury (Head of Pupil Welfare, Student Support Team), Dr M Singleton (Director of Studies), Mr K Ryan (Head of SEN, Student Support Team) and Mr M Boobbyer (Warden). The Guidance Planning Team ensures the Guidance Plan meets the full needs of the pupils and meets regularly throughout the year.

What is Guidance?

Guidance in second-level schools refers to a range of learning experiences, provided in a developmental sequence, that assist pupils to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses three separate, but interlinked, areas of:

- Personal and Social Development
- Educational guidance
- Career guidance

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 may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.

The plan addresses the guidance needs of all pupils at all levels within the school. As guidance is a whole school concern, the plan applies to school management and staff generally.

Statement of Guidance Policy

The Guidance & Counselling Department in St. Columba's College aims to aid in both the Personal Development and Career Development of pupils, throughout their St. Columba's years, thus allowing them make a smooth and healthy transition from the world of secondary education to the world of work or to further education. Our objectives are established by the good practice outlined by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and the National Centre for Guidance in Education, with a view to support the College values as a central goal. Guidance is a continuous developmental process which begins prior to the entry of the pupil to St. Columba's College and continues throughout the pupil's life in the school. Above all else, the needs of the pupil are central to any guidance practice.

Structure of the Guidance Team & Individual Responsibilities

The Guidance & Counselling Department has two branches, consisting of three permanent members of staff. Each has specific roles within the areas of guidance. The Guidance Counsellor, Mr. Humphrey Jones, along with Mr O'Shaughnessy, Careers Advisor, implement guidance lessons, advise on future career decision making, manage pupils' applications to third level institutions and oversee psychometric testing. Mrs Owen, the College Counsellor, oversees the emotional well-being of members of the St Columba's community. An external counsellor, Antoinette Aherne Breslin, is also available to meet pupils by appointment. Each member is available to both pupils and parents in an informal or formal setting. Appointments



can be made to meet them via email or a “drop in” system, available for pupils during certain school hours. Pupils may also be referred to the College Counsellor by the Warden, Sub-Warden, Matron, Housemasters or parents. A dedicated space for Guidance is located in the Submarine, a large private space in the College Library.

Roles of the Guidance & Counselling Team

The Guidance & Counselling Department has four distinct roles. These are:

1. Individual Counselling – This area includes both personal and career counselling. It aims to support pupils in their personal development, help them solve any problems they may have within learning, study, subject choice, progression and behaviour. Further detail on both Personal and Careers Counselling is outlined below.

2. Group Counselling – This service is available to pupils who may share common concerns including, but not limited to, social skills, sexual health, bereavement, depression, exam pressure, difficulty adjusting to boarding etc.

3. Psychometric Testing – This includes both cognitive and career-based tests. These are used to acquire information for self-understanding and to enable monitoring of academic progress. Aptitude tests, interest inventories and examination performance can help in problem-solving, decision-making and planning for the future. These are taken in Forms I, II, IV and V.

4. Provision of Information – Information is essential for effective decision making. The Firefly platform is the main resource area for Form V and VI pupils when making career decisions. This area contains a large collection of documents, timetables, videos and links to important websites. These Firefly resources are also shared with Form V parents in the Trinity term. We additionally provide lectures on various aspects of careers, seminars, excursions and occupational visits. The Guidance Team is based in the Submarine, a large space in the College Library, at the heart of the College campus.

Whole School Approach to Guidance

In St. Columba’s College, it has been recognised that all staff have a vital part to play in pupil care. The Counsellor and Head of Careers play a very important role in co-ordinating the School Guidance Policy. However, all staff members are an integral part of the delivery of the School Guidance Programme. Through the Pastoral Care structures, House and teaching staff meet pupils on an individual basis in the course of the year. From time to time staff members may refer pupils to the College Counsellor. Referrals on an emergency basis by staff members are also provided for. Pupils relate to different teachers in different ways and are encouraged to talk to any teacher they feel comfortable with if they need to. There is a pastoral care approach to deal with issues such as bullying (Student Support Team team overseen by the Warden), school attendance / punctuality, behaviour and progress in school. The College Counsellor works closely with Housemasters / Housemistresses, Form Teachers, Matron, Chaplain, Subject



Teachers, Sub Warden and Warden. The Guidance Counsellor reports to the Warden on a regular basis.

Guidance Programme

The Guidance Counselling Team provides for a range of activities giving information and advice to pupils at all stages of their St. Columba's experience. This allows for pupils to make informed and intelligent decisions for their future education or work. This programme is evolving, with new guidance lessons added for all Forms in 2021. The following section outlines the Careers & Educational structures available at each form.

Form I

Pupils entering the College undergo an induction programme, which ensures their smooth adjustment from primary to secondary school. New Form I pupils are invited to the College in advance of the school year. There is an induction workshop organised upon arrival in the College. Pupils complete an entrance examination, not for admissions purposes but solely to identify individuals who may need additional support or challenge. All pupils are also given Literacy and Numeracy screening assessments by the Special Educational Needs Department while the Guidance Counsellor administers Drumcondra assessments to all in Form I in September. Any pupil with specific learning or personal difficulties is met on an individual basis, along with the Learning Support Team, if required, and procedures for future approaches are formulated for that individual pupil. Referral of individual pupils may also be used by Subject Teachers or House staff to the College Counsellor. Referral to any external counsellor or educational psychologist will only be made after consultation with the Warden, Housemaster and parents. Group counselling may also be used for any pupils who may experience difficulties adjusting to the new school environment. In 2021, a series of guidance lessons were introduced for all Forms. In Form I, the themes of these lessons include: adjusting to secondary school, working effectively in school & prep, leading by example, values & self concept, understanding how I learn and sitting examinations.

Form II

The guidance lessons continued in Form II, with a focus on study skills, exploring interests and investigating careers. The Guidance Counsellor administers the Drumcondra Reading & Maths Tests to pupils in Form II in May, to track progress from Form I. Counselling services are, as always, available to pupils throughout Form II as outlined previously. Additionally, a leadership and team building workshop takes place to help build communication, resilience and team skills.

Form III

There is a strong focus on providing academic support to pupils in Form III. As well as working with the Guidance Counsellor, through guidance lessons (themes: preparing for Junior Cycle examinations, being proactive, goal setting), pupils are also assigned an Academic Tutor in Form III. The overall role of the third form tutor is to fuse the academic and the pastoral so as to guide the learner as a whole person. The tutor is on hand to advise pupils about their study, offer support with any difficulties they may have, discuss their effort marks and generally help



them to maximise their academic potential. The Junior Cycle is very important for pupils who intend to apply to UCAS in 5th / 6th form and is essential for a UK university's assessment of a candidate's ability.

The Guidance Team facilitates a Study Skills Seminar for all Form III pupils in this important year and the team also provides information on subject choice for Transition Year later in the year. We also hold a well-being meeting in February to help pupils manage the stresses of the Junior Cycle (such as submission of CBAs). Any pupil or their parents may arrange to meet the Guidance Counsellor for information on any aspect of career development. The Guidance Counsellor also administers a simple, introductory careers interest assessment to Form III, to get them to begin the process of career exploration.

Form IV (Transition Year)

Transition Year offers pupils a wonderful opportunity to explore their career interests, aptitudes, values and gain an insight to the role of personality in career choice. It is the aim of the Guidance Counsellor that pupils in Transition Year increase their career decision-making self-efficacy over the course of the year, through the various opportunities made available to them. Guidance lessons focus on values, interest and aptitudes, building career skills, preparing for work experience, reflecting on work experience, career exploration and more. The Guidance Counsellor administers the MyFutureChoice and MyAptitude interest and aptitude assessments in October of TY, while smaller assessments are used in the guidance lessons. All pupils in TY complete two planned work experience placements in the Michaelmas and Hilary terms. A 'Careers Convention' is also held in the Trinity term. This involves Old Columbans or friends of the College who meet TY pupils and discuss their careers. The Guidance Counsellor is available to aid in the subject selection required for V and VI Forms. To this end, a Subject Choice Seminar takes place during the year.

Form V

A study skills workshop is held for Form V in the Michaelmas term, hosted by Form VI pupils who share their "top tips" on planning, studying and preparing for examinations. In this term, each pupil is also assigned an Academic Tutor (overseen by Mr Clarke) to aid in his / her career decisions and academic progress. Often, this teacher will represent the area of study that the pupil is interested in studying in further education. In the first term pupils complete the MyUniChoices career assessment, and MyAptitude Core. These tools, along with the online portal, allow pupils to find courses that match their interest and aptitude in institutions in Ireland, the UK and Europe. At this stage, pupils begin to consider the possible pathway they may take in further education. The University applications process begins in earnest in the Trinity Term. All pupils are introduced to the CAO, UCAS and European application procedures. Each pupil (and Form V parent) will thereafter receive the University Applications Guide on Firefly, a series of documents prepared by the Head of Careers, which will aid in the application procedure.

Guidance lessons continue, but this time in small groups over the course of each term. Themes for these small group lessons include developing a growth mindset, habits of effective learners, planning for the future. Over the course of the year, pupils are met on an individual basis by the Guidance Counsellor and Mr O'Shaughnessy, Careers Advisor. Potential candidates for UCAS are met as a group by Mr O'Shaughnessy, who has responsibility for this area. Pupils also



begin to prepare their personal statements for their UCAS (or European) applications over the summer holidays and discuss possible university courses / destinations with their parents.

Form VI

Guidance lessons in small groups continue over Form VI, on managing workload, effective study, managing CAO and UCAS applications, studying in Europe, transitioning to third level and the world of work. All pupils are encouraged to meet the Guidance Counsellor and Careers Advisor regularly, as well as their Academic Tutor. This ensures that they are well guided towards the courses and universities that suit them best. Visiting speakers, university campus tours and visits to open days are arranged for interested pupils. Mr O'Shaughnessy is available to meet and advise pupils on an individual basis on their UCAS applications. Personal statements are prepared in consultation with Academic Tutors and Mr Clarke. The Guidance Department provides advice and information for Housemasters in the provision of Pupil References or any other application requirements. All applications are tracked and any issues are highlighted and dealt with. Any pupil invited for an interview in any university is provided with guidance and practice. The Guidance Counsellor and Careers Advisor are available when pupils obtain their Leaving Certificate Examination results in August and may also aid in any past pupil's application to university (especially UCAS, US and European universities) subsequent to their having completed their education in the College. Of course, the Guidance Team is available to the pupils for any concern or issue they may face during their final year in St. Columba's.

University Entrance

The guidance team at our school is dedicated to supporting pupils in their applications to universities across Ireland, the UK, Europe, the US, and other international destinations. Our Guidance Team provides comprehensive assistance throughout the application process, offering one-to-one appointments to discuss individual aspirations and options. We help students navigate the various application systems, including the CAO for Irish universities, UCAS for UK institutions, and specific procedures for European and US universities. Our team organises informative talks and workshops on different educational systems, application requirements, and deadlines. We assist with personal statement writing, interview preparation, and completing application forms. Additionally, we maintain up-to-date information on course options, entry requirements, and funding opportunities for international study. Our guidance counsellors also collaborate with subject teachers to ensure students are well-prepared academically for their chosen paths. Through this multifaceted approach, we aim to empower our pupils to make informed decisions about their higher education journey, whether in Ireland or abroad.

Guidance & Wellbeing

The work of the Guidance Team occurs in tandem with the Wellbeing Programme within the College, coordinated by our Student Support Team. The School Counsellor (Mrs Owen) sits on the Student Support Team. The Guidance Team work closely with the Warden, Sub-Warden, our colleagues in Special Educational Needs (SEN), teachers or SPHE & CSPE, the School



Nursing Team, the Chaplain, the Transition Year Co-ordinator and indeed all staff to ensure the needs of our pupils are met

All pupils have the opportunity to meet members of the Guidance Team for counselling, for both personal and career exploration. Counselling helps pupils explore their thoughts and feelings and the choices open to them. It gives care and support to pupils learning to cope with the many aspects of growing up and school life and with their individual personal circumstances. Individuals may be referred by the School Matron, House staff, the Warden or Sub Warden. Of course, pupils are able to self-refer at any time and can arrange to meet the School Counsellor at any mutually suitable time or drop in at the assigned times. An external Counselling Psychotherapist is also available (details below).

Referrals

In some incidences, pupils may need to be referred to outside agencies or counsellors if the College Counsellor feels it is necessary to fully resolve the pupil's issue. This referral process will be done in consultation with the pupil, his / her parents, the Matron along with the College Medical Officer and the Warden. The Counsellor has built a strong relationship with the nearby ZestLife Therapeutic Services over the past years and they come recommended.

Child Protection

The Guidance Policy is formed within the framework of the school's Child Protection Policy. In the event of a child protection issue coming to the fore, the Counsellor will liaise with both the Warden and the Designated Child Protection Officer, as set out in our Child Protection Policy.

Links to Other Policies & Curricular Delivery

As the Guidance Plan is designed within the framework of the School Plan, the Guidance Planning Team identify the following policies are relevant to this document:

- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Critical Incident Management Policy
- Substance Abuse Policy
- Self-Harm Policy
- Social, Personal & Health Education
- Child Protection Policy
- Relationship & Sexuality Education Policy
- Risk Assessment & Child Safe Guarding Statement
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Transition Year Programme
- Code of Behaviour

It is imperative that the Guidance Team make strong links with subject teachers. The Guidance Counsellor attends the regular Heads of Department Meetings to ensure the needs of pupils and subject departments are met.



Subject teachers can have a key role to play in:

- providing pupils with information and expertise on both the content and demands of their particular subject(s) syllabus or specification
- supporting pupils in choosing subjects and levels for the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations
- indicating to senior cycle pupils the content and study commitments of particular subjects in further and higher education courses.

Implementation & Review

The responsibility for implementing the Guidance Plan is with the Guidance Counsellor, the Guidance Planning Team and the Senior Leadership Team. The document will be reviewed annually, on the anniversary of its formal ratification by the Board of Management.