



Oatlands College Guidance and Counselling Policy

Introduction

Guidance Counselling is at the heart of Pastoral Care in Oatlands College. Guidance and Counselling incorporates the three strands of:

1. Personal Counselling: Mental Health support
2. Educational Counselling: Subject Choices; Identifying areas of Aptitude, Skills, Interests and Multiple Intelligences
3. Vocational/Careers Counselling: Future Career Planning and Progression

The vision is to supply an effective and comprehensive guidance service which enables our students and their parents/guardians to acquire knowledge and develop competencies for their future careers, to broaden their horizons and to strive to be successful on their pathways in life.

Rationale for this Policy

This policy statement will be the basis on which a regular review and evaluation of the Guidance and Counselling Service will be conducted between the Guidance Counsellor, the Principal and other key stakeholders. A comprehensive review will take place on an annual basis of the entire Guidance and Counselling Service within the context of the Whole School Plan. This will provide an opportunity for the Guidance Counsellor to give a full report to the Senior Management team in the school, receive feedback on any shortfalls in the service and agree a budget for the following year.

The Guidance and Counselling Service is subject to all relevant legal requirements: the provisions of the *1998 Education Act*, the Department of Education and Skills Directives, Children First 2015, Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017, the school's Educational Philosophy and the School Plan.

The Guidance Counsellor like all other members of staff in the school is entrusted with the care of their students in "loco parentis" and accepts the responsibilities of this position, always keeping the student's welfare to the forefront. The Guidance Counsellor is constantly aware of their responsibility to the student, to the school, to their own profession, to

themselves and to the implementation of this policy. The Guidance Counsellor takes part in professional peer supervision in addition to ongoing Continuous Professional Development.

Confidentiality

The Guidance Counsellor will take reasonable care to ensure that consultations with students, parents and other professionals will take place in an appropriately private environment, especially in one-to-one consultations. Confidentiality of students will be maintained unless there is a disclosure of harm or intent to harm the student or others. Hence, confidentiality of the student will be respected provided it is in the best interest of the student and that no other party will be endangered by it and all legal and ethical requirements are respected. The student is informed of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of a session and at the start of each academic year at School Assembly.

Reporting Procedures

In Personal Counselling Interviews, the confidentiality rule is followed i.e., school management, class teacher, year head and/or parents/guardians are informed if it is felt that the student is a danger or at any risk to themselves and/or to/from others.

Record Keeping

Record keeping is an integral part of the administration of the Guidance and Counselling Service in Oatlands College. All records will be kept in accordance with the 'Freedom of Information Act' and the 'Data Protection Act'.

Record-keeping Procedures

Two types of records:

1. Personal records of all Personal counselling and Careers/Vocational Guidance Interviews.
2. Summary reference records of Personal Counselling sessions
 - Student records are kept for 7 years (minimum).
 - To ensure accuracy, the Guidance Counsellor tries to write up notes as soon as possible after the session.
 - Own shorthand used to include not using students' full names on email correspondence and on other documents within the Guidance Department.

Referral Services

Assistance for students will be sought from other qualified professionals outside the school, for areas of concern such as learning difficulties, additional counselling, substance misuse, bereavement, which the Guidance Counsellor considers necessary and appropriate. The Guidance Counsellor will supply all relevant information and seek the relevant permission from school authorities and parents or guardians. Teachers, school management and parents/guardians may refer students to the Guidance Counsellor. Clear procedures of referral, which have been agreed between the Principal, Staff, Parents/Guardians, and the Guidance Counsellor will be followed. The students can self-refer at any time.

Some strategies that are used include:

- Informing parents/guardians, staff, and students as to the procedures for student referral both inside and outside the school.
- School Care Meetings to identify and help students at risk.
- Liaise with the Department of Education Psychological Service (NEPS) and local support services such as Lucena and Pieta House.

Protocol for Meetings

Meetings with students

Meetings are usually by appointment. Students request an appointment with the Guidance Counsellor. Students are given an appointment slip by the Guidance Counsellor. This is signed by their subject teacher at the time of the appointment. Attendance is marked by the Guidance Counsellor on the VS Ware system used by the school. Students are provided with a "time of return to class" slip by the Guidance Counsellor when they are leaving their appointment.

Meetings with Parents/Guardians

Parents/Guardians make appointments with the Guidance Counsellor by telephoning the school. Appointments take place during the school day. All parties are requested to inform each other if a cancellation is necessary. On occasion, the Guidance Counsellor may request another staff member e.g., Year head, subject teacher and/or management to be present at a meeting or vice versa. The student is frequently invited in for all or part of the meeting. The student is given responsibility and inclusion in the meetings and its outcomes.

Guidance Counsellor will endeavour to be facilitative and supportive rather than prescriptive with respect to students` decision making.

Any matters involving harm and abuse are immediately brought to the attention of the DLP or DDLP and are progressed to Tusla and other relevant bodies as necessary.

In Oatlands College the DLP (Designated Liaison Person) is the school Principal and DDLP (deputy Designated Liaison Person) is the vice-principal.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 29th January 2023.