A Single Case Study of a Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in an Irish Post-Primary School

Case Report

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February 2016
This research project was funded by the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, University of Limerick, Seed Funding Initiative (2014-2015)

Special thanks to the management, staff and students of the case school for their involvement in this research study
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<td>ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY &amp; COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS</td>
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<td>ASTI</td>
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<td>BOM</td>
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<td>CAMHS</td>
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<td>CLD</td>
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<td>DATS</td>
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<td>DE</td>
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<td>DEIS</td>
<td>DELIVERING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN SCHOOLS</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION &amp; SCIENCE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION &amp; SKILLS</td>
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<td>DLP</td>
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<td>ELGPN</td>
<td>EUROPEAN LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICY NETWORK</td>
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<td>GP</td>
<td>GENERAL PRACTITIONER</td>
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<td>HSE</td>
<td>HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE</td>
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<td>IGC</td>
<td>INSTITUTE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS</td>
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<td>JCP</td>
<td>JUNIOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME</td>
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<td>JMB</td>
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<td>LCA</td>
<td>LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIE</td>
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<td>LCP</td>
<td>LEAVING CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME</td>
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<td>LCVP</td>
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<td>NAPD</td>
<td>NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPALS &amp; DEPUTY PRINCIPALS</td>
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<td>NCCA</td>
<td>NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT</td>
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<td>NCCE</td>
<td>NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION</td>
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<td>NEPS</td>
<td>NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE</td>
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<td>NGF</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT</td>
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<td>OGA</td>
<td>ONE GOOD ADULT</td>
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Section 1: Introduction

This narrative report will present the findings of a funded research project in the form of a single case study carried out during a specific time period, from the 1st September 2014 to 25th February 2015 in one Irish post primary school. The data collection period took place between late November 2014 and mid-February 2015. This single case study examined a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one post primary school since the re-allocation of guidance counselling provision in Budget 2012. Ever since the Irish Education Act (1998) a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been disseminated by Irish policy-makers as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector (Hearne & Galvin, 2014). This method of provision is viewed as a whole school responsibility where schools are expected to collaboratively cultivate a school guidance service to support the needs of students (DES, 2005a, 2012; NCGE, 2004). However, the re-allocation of guidance counselling hours in Budget 2012 has given rise to a radically changed field of practice with the diminution of guidance provision across all parts of the curriculum now evident (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). In essence, guidance posts are no longer allocated on an ex-quota basis and decisions on resourcing guidance provision have now been devolved to school management (DES, 2012).

In response to the numerous national quantitative studies that have emerged on the 2012 re-allocation issue, this research project set out to examine the current situation through the application of an explanatory case study in one school. The necessity for methodological pluralism in guidance counselling, and the application of case study approaches in particular, has gained ground in recent years (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Hearne, 2009). For the purposes of this case study, and to maintain anonymity of the case site and the participants involved, the post primary school will be called the ‘case school’. In addition, the publication dates on secondary documentation pertaining to the case school, which were used to contextualise the case study, are not provided. It is important to note that during the earlier part of the research fieldwork the guidance counsellor in the school was absent and the school was un-resourced for a brief period until a temporary guidance counsellor was employed by the school.
(i) **Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of this single case study is to critically examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the Irish post-primary sector using an explanatory case study approach in one mixed gender school.

The main objectives of the study were:

1. Undertake a preliminary literature review on whole school guidance counselling in the context of the Irish post-primary sector.
2. Investigate the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one school from the perspectives of four key stakeholders: school management, the guidance counsellor, teaching and support staff, and students, through a combination of methods of data collection and analysis.
3. Produce a case study report with a case study protocol to inform future practice in the Irish guidance counselling profession.

This case report is presented in a linear-analytic structure which is applicable to explanatory case studies (Yin, 2009). The first section introduces the case study specifying its aim and objectives. The second section describes the case study methodology, including the methods of data collection and analysis and ethical issues involved in carrying out the study in the case school. The third section provides a preliminary review of the literature that contextualises the case study. Section four provides information on the case school. In section five the primary findings from the data collected in the case school are discussed. Sections six and seven provide a discussion on the overall findings and a conclusion to the case study.
Section 2: Case Study Methodology

This section addresses the methodological approach underpinning the research study including the research design, methods of data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations involved.

(i) Case Study Design

The intention of this explanatory case study is not to evaluate, pass judgement or make recommendations, but rather to explain what is currently happening in guidance counselling practice through elucidating the causal links regarding the real-life intervention of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one case site. In the main, case studies are the chosen method when:

(a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.

(Yin, 2009, p.2)

Case studies are used for a number of reasons in education, guidance counselling and therapeutic research including for evaluation purposes (Cohen et al., 2011; McLeod, 2010; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2009). In general, case study research provides the opportunity to explore complex relations and processes and the influence of contextual factors to inform policy and practice within a discipline (McLeod, 2010; Stake, 2004). Yin (2009) argues that the explanatory case study method is suitable to explain interventions that are too complex to understand by the sole use of survey or experimental strategies. Yin’s (2009, p.18) definition of case study is used in this research:

It is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

(Yin, 2009, p.18)

Although case study is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry, it is argued as being limited by those who support a scientific approach (Cohen et al., 2011; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2009). The use of multiple sources of evidence including pattern matching, explanation building, addressing of rival explanations and the design of a case study protocol aims to address validity and reliability issues in this case study (Yin, 2009).

The design of this single case study involved the development of a theoretical framework and a case study protocol to guide the execution and reporting of the case (Yin, 2009). The case study
protocol, which served to increase reliability and act as an aide-mémoire for the data collection procedures, was an important task in the project from the start of the research process to its final completion (Yin, 2009). At the outset of the design, several issues were considered in the planning of this case study, as highlighted by Cohen et al. (2011):

1) Specific circumstances of the case, including negotiation of access to participants in the case school as well as the ownership and release of the data.

2) Execution of the case study, i.e. sampling strategy, the data collection methods, triangulation of the data, the analytical strategy and case report writing.

3) The ethical consequences of the research for participants in terms of anonymity and dissemination of the findings.

The main research questions guiding this explanatory case study were:

1. How is a whole school approach to guidance counselling being provided within the case school?
2. What is the current nature of guidance counselling provision within the curriculum in the case school?
3. How has the DES Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling impacted on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school?

The investigation of these three research questions required a range of methods which will be explained in the next section.

(ii) Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Multiple sources of evidence were used to collect, analyse and interpret the data during the period between November 2014 and February 2015 for the “development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration” (Yin, 2009, p.115).

The mixed method approach involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. Analysis of secondary documentation provided by the school;
2. Administration of an online survey through SurveyMonkey to the total population of teaching and support staff within the case school;
3. Individual interviews with the school Principal, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor;
4. Two focus group interviews with a sample of Junior and Senior Cycle students.
Initially, 12 post primary schools were purposefully sampled in one large geographical region were invited to take part in this single case study. Following institutional (UL) ethical approval, letters of invitation and consent forms were sent to the Principals and guidance counsellor/s in the 12 identified schools in late October, 2014. The first volunteering school agreed to take part in the project and an initial meeting was held with the school Principal (gatekeeper) in mid-November, 2014 to discuss the purpose of the study, access and sampling of participants, methods of data collection and dissemination of findings. The data was then collected through a number of overlapping stages over the following three months during a busy period in the school year.

Firstly, to contextualise the case study, secondary data analysis was carried out on documents provided by the school during the fieldwork phase. The documents were the current School Guidance Plan, School Plan, DES Whole-School Evaluation Report and DES Subject Inspection of Guidance Report.

Secondly, an online survey (SurveyMonkey) administered to the teaching and support staff elicited statistical and qualitative information on a whole school approach to guidance counselling, professional roles, activities, interventions and outcomes from the perspective of teaching and support staff. The Principal acted as gatekeeper in the process by forwarding the recruitment email and online survey to all teaching and support staff (n46), excluding the Principal, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor, in late November 2014. SurveyMonkey aided the data analysis phase and ensured greater rigour in the accuracy of the findings (Bell, 2005). Appropriate settings chosen on SurveyMonkey ensured that staff email addresses could not be saved, thus safeguarding anonymity. The online survey was administered twice more between December and February and yielded a final response rate of 18 staff (teaching only). The quantitative data on SurveyMonkey was exported to SPSS for analysis where categorical variables were analysed using simple descriptive and frequency statistics and relevant graphs and tables were generated. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data in the survey to identify themes and patterns (Thomas, 2009). This data was then analysed in order to identify convergence and divergence amongst the responses.
Thirdly, individual interviews were carried out with the Principal, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor between early December 2014 and early January 2015. Subject information letters and consent forms were supplied to the participants. The interviews were approximately 40 to 60 minutes in duration. Individual semi-structured interview frameworks were used for the different interviews to gather data on identified themes including a whole school approach to guidance counselling, roles and responsibilities and the impact of the Budget 2012 re-allocation on current guidance provision. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and individually analysed using thematic analysis that identified themes and patterns within the data. The findings from the three data sources were then integrated to ascertain convergence and divergence in the findings (Thomas, 2009).

Finally, two focus group interviews were held with a sample of students (total n18) from the Junior Cycle (3rd year) and Senior Cycle (6th year) in late January 2015. Although the focus group method has been critiqued for its contrived nature, in this case study it generated a multiplicity of perspectives on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school (Cohen et al., 2011). Each focus group had nine students, five female and four male. Information sheets and consent forms were administered to parents/guardians via Year Heads. A list was compiled by the research team of all of the students who had provided consent from their parents/guardians and themselves, and a number assigned to each student’s name. These numbers were inputted into www.randomizer.org to generate a random number list of ten numbers for each group. In advance of the focus groups, information sheets and focus group consent forms were distributed to the 20 students. In total, 18 students (nine in each group) took part in the two focus group interviews. They were 35 minutes in duration, audio-recorded and guided by two different thematic frameworks to generate discussion. Both focus groups were moderated by two members of the research team, one of whom facilitated the discussion and the other audio-recorded it and took notes. Similar to the individual interviews, the interview data was transcribed and thematic analysis was carried out on each data source separately in order to identify themes and patterns in the data (Thomas, 2009). The findings from the two focus groups were integrated to ascertain convergence and divergence in the overall findings.
The concluding stage of the analytical process was a cycle of inquiry that involved individual and group interpretation of the primary case data by the three members of the research team during two team meetings (McLeod, 2015). The three researchers firstly examined the findings from the three different primary data sources on their own, and then discussed their interpretations during the first team meeting. These combined interpretations then informed the drafting of the integrated data findings from the three primary data sources. This data was then discussed in a second data interpretation meeting through the lens of the three research questions which then formed the final interpretation of the data. As a method of interpretation of the data this collaborative process allowed different perspectives to emerge thus providing richness, depth and breadth in the elucidation of the complex case findings. The process was centered on the belief that each member of the research team had a valuable contribution to make and it also added rigor to the final interpretation of the case study (McLeod, 2015).

(iii) Ethical Considerations in the Case Study

This single case study was underpinned by a reflexive ethical approach in relation to the conduct of research in guidance counselling (Hearne, 2013). It was guided by a number of key ethical principles; namely, non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, fidelity and justice (IGC, 2012; McLeod, 2010; NCGE, 2008). The main ethical considerations involved in the study were maintaining confidentiality and informed consent. The study gained ethical approval from the University of Limerick’s Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Ethics Committee in late October 2014. Following signed consent from the school Principal (gatekeeper) to carry out the study in the case school all of the participants involved in the data collection were provided with detailed Subject Information Sheets and Consent Forms. With regard to students who were under 18, consent was gained from them as well as their parents/guardians (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). They were provided with clear and easily understandable information in written and verbal format (ibid, 2013). Finally, a draft copy of the case report was supplied to the school’s Principal, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor for respondent validation in May 2015 prior to its final publication (Cohen et al., 2011).
Section 3: Preliminary Literature Review

One of the key elements of conducting a case study is the carrying out a preliminary literature review to contextualise the research (Yin, 2009). This section provides an analysis of the relevant literature that complements the aim and research questions of this single case study. It concentrates on policy, practice and research related to a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the Irish post primary sector.

Guidance counselling was first introduced in Irish post-primary schools in 1966. In 1972, guidance provision was allocated on an ex-quota basis to all post primary schools with 250+ pupils. This was increased to 500 in 1983 In 1991, schools with a student enrolment of between 350 and 499 were allocated a half-ex quota post (DES, 2005b; McCoy et al., 2006) (see Appendix 2). The system of allocations expanded to include all schools (NGF, 2007) and this system remained unchanged until Budget 2012.

Regarding definitional issues, misunderstandings have arisen over the years about the different terms used to describe guidance counselling in current practice. Although Irish education policy tends to be influenced by external policies and practices it continues to safeguard the holistic model of guidance counselling within the post-primary sector. International definitions of guidance tend to focus more on lifelong career guidance, with the OECD (2004) defining career guidance as helping people of any age “to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers” (p.19). According to the Council of the European Union (2008) guidance encompasses a number of activities including “information giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills” (p. 3). In this way guidance should bring about self-responsibility in students and clients to develop their own lifelong career management skills (CMS), a concept that has now become central to policy discourse (Council of the European Union, 2008; ELGPN, 2012). From a practical perspective, Bassot et al. (2014) propose that teaching career learning and development (CLD) to young people
needs to be addressed at three levels; individual, community and social, and it can be part of the overall pastoral care and teaching structures within the school system.

As far back as 1992 the *Green Paper on Education* (DE, 1992) defined guidance as school services and activities that enable students to develop understanding of themselves and their talents, and aid parents to “help their children to develop positive attitudes and behaviour and to make satisfying and fulfilling educational and career choices” (p.107). According to the DES (2005a), guidance has three strands; “personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (p.4), and two specific activities, namely guidance and counselling. Through a range of activities guidance aims to instil independence, responsibility and self-awareness in students and to support them to follow through on the choices that they make through a range of activities (ibid, 2005a) (*see Appendix 3*). A further function of the guidance service is to address educational disadvantage and support students with disabilities and international students (NCGE, 2004). The National Guidance Forum (NGF, 2007) defines guidance as assisting:

> people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society.


The counselling dimension has been emphasised as an integral component of the post primary guidance programme and incorporates personal, educational and career counselling (DES, 2005a). It enables students to explore their inner thoughts and feelings, develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, as well as coping strategies, thus helping students to deal with any potential behavioural or personal difficulties (DES 2005a; Hayes & Morgan, 2011; NCGE, 2004). Notably, the NGF (2007) document states that whilst the guidance counsellor should provide personal counselling around a wide variety of issues, where the issues are deemed to be of a serious nature, he/she should refer students to appropriate specialised professionals. Cause for referral may include disclosures of suicidal ideation, addiction, sexual abuse or severe mental health issues. Nevertheless, in spite of the articulation of such boundaries by the NGF (2007), prior to the 2012 reallocation, a number of discrepancies in relation to role demarcation had emerged; namely, number of students seen for counselling, number of sessions provided, number of guidance
counsellors available in schools, and the amount of time allocated to each element of counselling (Hayes & Morgan, 2011). In addition, guidance counsellors felt inadequately supported in their counselling role and suggested that incorporating the views and opinions of students and parents might be beneficial for counselling (ibid, 2011).

Since the 1998 Education Act, 9(c), where guidance was viewed as a ‘whole school’ responsibility, post-primary schools in Ireland have been required to fulfil their statutory obligation in terms of access and appropriate provision within a whole school context (DES, 2005a). The Act (1998) clearly places the responsibility on the school to “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices” as well as “promote the social and personal development of the students.....in consultation with their parents” (Section 9d, p.13). Despite these exhortations ‘appropriate’ provision has remained a malleable concept in policy and practice discourse since the 1998 enactment (Hearne & Galvin, 2014). As far back as 2002 external reviewers recommended that the Irish Government needed to make “a clear statement, backed by resource decisions, that appropriate guidance includes access by all students to assistance with their career decision making and development” (OECD, 2002 p.9). The argument being the Government could rectify the lack of policies to ensure careers education was provided to all students, or that limited resources were not duplicated. However, the devolution of decision-making to school management on the allocation of guidance resources by the DES in Budget 2012 has firmly placed the responsibility at an institutional level thus widening the gap between policy and practice.

Nonetheless, the application of a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been disseminated as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012; NCGE, 2004), in spite of evidence to suggest that its execution has been less than uniform (DES, 2009; McCoy et al., 2006). Watkins (1998) posits that a whole school approach is evident when it is “comprehensive in its clientele; developmental in its mission; and distributed in its mode of operation” (p. 171). A whole school approach should aim to be proactive, available to all
students and shared across the school. The notion of guidance as exchanges merely between the guidance counsellor and student is replaced by the concept of aspects of guidance that are “more embedded in the daily life of the organisation and the core activities of the school” (ibid, p.171). The concept of embeddedness is particularly relevant in the context of the counselling dimension of guidance work in schools where it is part of a range of other activities offered by the guidance service. McLeod (2007) argues that for any profession where counselling work is part of a work role certain organisational factors need to be taken into account such as: time available for counselling; space to carry out the work; confidentiality limits; freedom to express emotion; voluntariness; and attitudes to counselling by service users, colleagues and management.

Whole school provision of guidance counselling requires the implementation of a school guidance plan that involves the contribution of a range of stakeholders in the delivery of an effective guidance counselling service including guidance counsellors, all members of management and staff, as well as students and parents, local business, NEPS and other agencies (ACCS et al., 2012; DES, 2005a). Since the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling whole school guidance planning appears to be more relevant than ever as it provides a means for schools to recognise, prioritise and address the guidance counselling needs of students utilising the available guidance resources in the school (ACCS et al., 2012). Nonetheless, to date, there has been no set curriculum for guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools and since 2012 it would appear to be more elusive than ever. Indeed, since 1998, there has been a complicated history in achieving consensus on the importance of guidance counselling in the school system through a more integrated, holistic delivery. Various measures had been instigated to support schools including a number of publications and DES Circulars by the NCGE (2004), DES (2005a, 2005b, 2012) and ACCS et al. (2012). In 2007, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2007) Draft Curriculum Framework for Guidance in Irish Post-primary Schools proposed a structure and direction for guidance provision. It was acknowledged in the document that whilst not all students require one to one counselling; they should be able to access counselling support when necessary. However,
the discussion on the NCCA curriculum became stalled and could be seen as a lost opportunity in light of the radical changes in provision since Budget 2012 (Hearne & Galvin, 2014).

From the early 2000’s onward research on guidance counselling in the Irish post primary sector has thrown up certain anomalies in terms of provision, including disparities in the levels of delivery within the Junior and Senior Cycles and definitional confusion over the terms guidance counselling, guidance and counselling (DES, 2009; Hayes & Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014). In spite of the pivotal role of the guidance counsellor in guiding students during Junior Cycle to shape their future outcomes the issue of Junior Cycle students being particularly disenfranchised in relation to guidance provision has been consistently reported in the last decade (McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004; OECD, 2002; Smyth et al., 2015). More recently the IGC (2013) has reported that Junior Cycle students were only assigned 9.69% of the guidance allocation since 2012.

The issues of professional boundaries and referral have also been called into sharp focus since 2012. Two IGC role documents (1998, 2008) describe the role of the guidance counsellor as engaging in personal, educational, and vocational counselling with clients throughout the lifespan. The guidance counsellor is expected to design the guidance programme, a yearly Guidance Plan and a schedule of activities to ensure successful delivery. Three specific areas of activities focus on helping students to make choices and manage transitions, as well as the achievement of guidance service and organisational aims (NCGE, 2004). However, the new guidance allocation arrangements now require guidance counsellors to teach a curriculum subject as well as provide guidance counselling (DES, 2012). Schools have also been instructed to ensure that the guidance counsellor has one to one time to meet the counselling needs of students experiencing difficulties or in crisis situations (ibid, 2012), thus indicating a more reactive than preventative role for the guidance service. In terms of a whole school approach to guidance counselling it is articulated that a number of other stakeholders ought to be involved in the process with the guidance counsellor having a central position (ACCS et al., 2012; DES, 2005a).
According to the NCGE (2004), the Board of Management and school management team are responsible for overseeing the provision of guidance by working collaboratively with the guidance counsellor and school staff to manage guidance planning and ensure its consistent implementation. Subject teachers may support students by providing relevant subject advice for careers and through formal management or pastoral care roles, as well as co-ordination roles for Senior Cycle programmes (ibid, 2004). On a more informal level, students may actively seek out certain teachers for advice or consultation. Teachers, then, are within their rights to seek advice from the guidance services for matters that are deemed outside of their own competencies (ibid, 2004). The on-going research being carried out by Headstrong (2015) identifies the significance of ‘one good adult’ (OGA) in a young person’s life to help him/her cope with mental health issues. However, Hearne and Galvin (2014) found in their recent study that although 80% of regular teachers identified pastoral care as a central role of their work, they reported an inadequate amount of pastoral care training throughout their teacher training and career development. Furthermore, whilst the teachers in the 2014 study agreed that the delivery of appropriate guidance was a whole school responsibility, they envisaged that the Budget 2012 re-allocation would increase existent teaching and pastoral care pressures due to deficits in a whole school approach to guidance provision.

In relation to other stakeholders, parents are often identified as being highly influential in the career decision making process (DES, 1995; NCGE, 2004; McCoy et al., 2014) and are viewed as “integral partners in the education of their child” (NCGE, 2004, p.149). However, McCoy et al. (2014) report that while parents are the main source of advice for students considering education and career options at school completion, they are seldom a decisive influence. It is argued that students should also be involved in the guidance programme and the development of the guidance plan and through bodies such as the Student Council they can voice their opinions on the essential elements of the guidance programme (NCGE, 2004). Finally, the role of the external community is also highlighted as important in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (NCGE, 2004). External stakeholders can include agencies for referral for intensive personal support, work experience and employment opportunities that encourage students’ career learning and
development skills, and information resources in the areas of higher education, further education and training (Bassot et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004).

Since the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision evidence has been growing in relation to the fragmented nature of guidance delivery and the impact of the new policy on school, staff and students. A number of national surveys (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013) have been carried out to date. From the evidence gathered in schools the most significant changes include the reported decrease in guidance allocation by schools with a reduction of 26.67% (IGC, 2013) and 25% (NCGE, 2013) reported. The IGC (2013) also identified that during the periods 2011–2012 and 2012–2013, there was a 19.8% increase in timetabled classroom guidance delivery, and a 51.4% reduction in one-to-one counselling (personal, educational and vocational). In its most recent research, the IGC (2014) reported an overall increase of 12.8% in timetabled classroom guidance and a 58.8% reduction in one-to-one guidance counselling.

According to the IGC (2014) there has been a significant diminution in professional practice for qualified practitioners:

While there was an overall 23.7% loss of practice hours, analyses further found that guidance counsellors spent 84.1% of those hours’ time-tabled for classroom teaching of subjects other than guidance; subject teaching (62.6%), S.P.H.E. (23.8%), and other (13.6%). This equates to 1 in 5 guidance counsellors now performing a full-time teaching role which equates to a removal of approximately 168 guidance counsellors from the guidance counselling service in second level schools and colleges of further education. (IGC, 2014, p. 6)

Finally, although the DES 2012 re-allocation appears to have severely constrained the role of the guidance counsellor and impacted upon the provision of a quality guidance service there are also recent policy discourse is somewhat contradictory. A number of policy measures have been introduced within the post primary school system to support student wellbeing through a whole school approach and a Student Support Team (SST) structure (DES, 2013a; 2013b). The DES (DES, 2013a; 2013b) postulates the importance of the guidance counsellor in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives at a time when resources have been considerably diminished. It is against this backdrop that this research study set out to examine the issue in one case school during a short period in 2014-2015.
Section 4: The Case School

The case school comes under the jurisdiction of the local Education and Training Board (formerly Vocational Education Committee). It has been in existence for over 70 years and is situated in a relatively rural location. Previously the school had DEIS status but this has since been removed. There are six year groups and the curriculum comprises five programmes: Junior Certificate Programme (JCP), optional Transition Year Programme (TYP), Leaving Certificate Programme (LCP), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). There are four class groups per year, with the exception of Transition Year (TY) which has two class groups. The current student population of 605 consists of 300 students in Junior Cycle; 50 students in Transition Year; 200 students in Senior Cycle and 55 attend a local Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) college.

The case school has a Board of Management (BOM) comprising 12 members which works in collaboration with senior management. The school management structure includes a Principal and a Deputy Principal, Posts of Responsibility (n6), Special Duties Teachers (n13), and a combination of individual Year Heads and Class Teachers across the six curriculum years. There are 46 teaching and support staff which includes one qualified guidance counsellor. In addition there is a combination of secretarial, caretaking, ancillary staff, a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) and a school bus driver.

In recent times a DES Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was carried out in the case school. It has also had a number of DES subject inspections including a guidance inspection in the mid 2000’s. The WSE-MLL school report commended the maintenance of the guidance and counselling provision in relation to formal guidance in Senior Cycle and informal guidance in Junior Cycle. The school currently employs one full-time professionally qualified guidance counsellor with an allocation of 19 hours and 40 minutes of guidance counselling for the 605 students. In addition, the guidance counsellor has two curriculum subject classes. Prior to Budget 2012, the school had a slightly higher allocation of 23-24 ex-quota hours for guidance counselling equally divided between two part time guidance counsellors. This was higher than the
previous allocation of 17 hours noted in the school’s DES Guidance Inspection report. However, one of the guidance counsellors retired in August 2014 and has not been replaced. With regard to a whole school approach to guidance counselling, whilst the guidance service appears to be part of the pastoral care and Student Support Team (SST) it holds its own distinctness in terms of personal, educational and career guidance provision. The guidance counsellor plays a central role in the system of student support, as point noted in the school’s DES Guidance Inspection report. According to the school Guidance Plan (2014-2015) two separate SST’s for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle groups, comprise relevant Year Heads and class tutors. The SST’s meet weekly with the aim of identifying and resolving issues for students experiencing problems or difficulties either inside or outside of the school. The Deputy Principal is responsible for overseeing the two SST’s, whilst the Principal is responsible for overseeing external policies including the two DES policies (2013a, 2013b) *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools; Guidelines for mental health promotion and suicide prevention* and the *Action Plan on Bullying*. The Principal is also responsible for the allocation and timetabling of guidance counselling in the case school.

The guidance counsellor has completed a range of CPD activities including crisis response training and the NCGE training programme in Guidance Planning. The delivery of the guidance service within the allocated hours is informed by an annual school Guidance Plan. However, the guidance counsellor regularly works outside his designated hours, i.e. during free classes/ break times just as subject teachers do. He is also in attendance for a number of key events during the school year; namely, the school entrance exams held on a Saturday, an Information Evening for Third Year parents, a Career Night for Senior Cycle parents and Leaving Certificate results day in August. The school DES Guidance Inspection reported a number of strengths of the guidance service including its dedication to the holistic development of the student, involvement in the pastoral care structures, development of a crisis response team and well-developed links with external agencies. In addition, the report recommended the augmentation of the delivery of guidance in the case school including the provision of specific guidance classes to Junior Cycle students, a combination of guidance classes in Senior Cycle, and facilitation by the school for the guidance staff to attend professional supervision provided by the DES/IGC.
Section 5: Primary Data Findings

The primary findings from the different data sources will be presented in this section. Data was collected during a two month period in the case school site by the research team. The qualitative findings from the individual interviews and focus groups will be discussed first, followed by the findings from the staff survey.

(a) Individual Interviews

The findings from the individual interviews with the Principal, Deputy Principal and the guidance counsellor will be presented through the four key themes that were identified in the data.

(i) Whole-school approach to guidance counselling in the case school

The three participants agreed that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school at present but it is broader than just the guidance counsellor as it encompasses the SST structure. The role of other relevant stakeholders in the school was also highlighted in the interviews, in particular in relation to role of the middle management team as part of this system. The weekly SST meetings comprise the Deputy Principal, Junior Cycle Year and Senior Cycle Year Heads and the guidance counsellor.

A whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school contributes to the pastoral care structures with the Principal stating ‘any staff member can bring up anybody to the support team from that side’. Once a concern is raised about a particular student with the relevant SST, the case is discussed and the guidance counsellor becomes involved if necessary. The Principal also explained that when considering subject and career choice, students are recommended to seek the advice of all teachers and gain as much information about subjects that they might be interested in. This was also echoed by the guidance counsellor who saw the approach to guidance counselling at the school as involving all members of staff:

‘I suppose everyone’s involved, it’s kind of an inclusive service.... And I guess whole school approach.... you’d see guidance, I suppose as being administered by other people, not just the guidance counsellor’.
The idea of staff working collaboratively and linking in with each other was also highlighted by the Deputy Principal as being a central part of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. She emphasised that the guidance counsellor does not work in isolation, but with other staff members including Year Heads and the Deputy Principal, and they all refer cases to each other as required, ‘we do try to work together... it’s not like the guidance is on their own working away doing their own thing...we see it as a link’. Furthermore, the Deputy Principal refers all relevant cases to the Principal, and the Principal liaises with the guidance counsellor, Deputy Principal, and Year Heads as necessary.

(ii) Role of stakeholders in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school

The three interviewees explained their own roles and the roles of other members of the school community in relation to a whole school approach to guidance counselling. With regard to the guidance counsellor’s role, the three participants viewed the different components of guidance counselling personal/social, educational and career guidance as separate but interlinked. The Principal felt that career guidance and personal counselling were ‘two very distinct roles’. Furthermore, while he considered the guidance counsellor to be ‘very very highly qualified in the careers part of it’, with regards to the personal counselling aspect of the role, he felt that guidance counsellors in general are not professionally qualified to deal with serious student issues. In such situations, parents are always advised to take their child to a doctor and the role of the guidance counsellor is ‘holding ...like they’re not fully qualified counsellors....they keep things at bay until a fully qualified professional can deal with it outside of the school’. The Deputy Principal viewed guidance provision as:

‘I kind of separate the careers from it a bit.... I would see guidance as in the word guiding people around pastoral care as well... I’d be inclined to link the two of them really to be honest’.

The guidance counsellor differentiated between the different aspects of guidance counselling. Personal guidance counselling was about trying to ‘listen and assess what’s going on’, while career guidance classes focus more on ‘self-directing learning’, for example explaining to students how to look up a UCAS course and then letting them carry it out themselves. The guidance counsellor viewed his role providing ‘more focused and qualified guidance and teaching’ as well as carrying out
assessments and administering the DATS tests to third year students. Furthermore, he is responsible for developing his own guidance curriculum from DES Circulars as well as his own ideas:

‘I try to hit all the basics.. so the education, the vocational...the counselling side.. you know... so to introduce something on all of those aspects I suppose is my own goal’.

Senior management have a central role in the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school. The Principal identified his role as providing information on subjects to students at a yearly Careers Night before they enter 5th year, but not in any other aspect of guidance (such as CAO points or DATS tests). Furthermore, he is responsible for the allocation of guidance hours from the teaching load, and for the creation of the guidance timetable. In order to create a timetable he has to take 22 hours teaching time from the teaching timetable and allocate it to the guidance counsellor ‘so that he can teach career guidance to the senior classes’, as well as ensure that there is time for the counselling aspect of guidance.

The Deputy Principal identified her role as having more involvement with ‘personal’ guidance, as opposed to career guidance. She makes an important distinction between the different aspects of guidance provision:

‘I think careers is one thing and the CAO and points and guiding them towards subject areas, and I see guidance then as separate, and I suppose I see myself as that bit more involved in the guidance side of it than I do the careers side of it as a deputy’.

While the Deputy Principal does not play a role in career guidance, she does coordinate the special needs programme at the school and liaises with universities for the DARE scheme. Due to the fact that she is not in class, she has more time to obtain information and mediate with parents as well as external agencies, such as NEPS. Furthermore, she is a channel for passing relevant information to the guidance counsellor and other staff. Whilst Year Heads have to return to class after their SST meetings, she can follow up on issues that have arisen in the meetings. She also perceived her role, in conjunction with the Principal, as a support to the guidance counsellor and ensures that he gets time to attend supervision, training and in-service activities. Similarly, the guidance counsellor viewed the role of senior management as supporting the provision of guidance and ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to the service.
A lot of emphasis was placed on the role of middle management teams in a whole school approach to guidance counselling by the three interviewees. Each of them believed that the Year Head system in the SST structure has been a very effective system in the school for a number of years. Feeding into these teams are teachers and class tutors. The Deputy Principal explained that the school does not have a separate pastoral care team, rather the Year Head system is a combination of a pastoral care team and a guidance service. The Year Head system helps to alleviate the guidance counsellor’s workload, as Year Heads talk to students and try to deal with issues themselves, only referring issues that require the specialist skills of the guidance counsellor. In this way, the guidance counsellor is not over-burdened with cases that can be dealt with in other ways. Similarly, teachers and class tutors who may try to deal with an issue outside of their area of expertise or competence can refer to the Year Heads and the guidance counsellor.

The Principal and Deputy Principal highlighted the impact of additional government cuts in post primary education that have resulted in the loss of special duties teachers and Assistant Principals in the case school. Year Heads take the role of Assistant Principals and are allocated four hours out of teaching time to carry out the role and meet their students. Following the retirement of one Assistant Principal the previous year, a lack of funding has meant that the post has not been replaced and the school now relies on a teacher volunteering to take up the role of Year Head for the group within the SST. Additionally, the Deputy Principal expressed concern that an increase in workload for the guidance counsellor would also affect Year Heads who may become frustrated by the pressure on resources.

The role of teaching staff in providing educational and vocational guidance was emphasised by both the Principal and guidance counsellor. The Principal stated that ‘students are encouraged to seek the advice of all teachers, not just career guidance teachers about subjects, when picking subjects for career choices’. The guidance counsellor emphasised the role of Transition Year teachers in discussing career choices related to certain subjects and modules. He argued there is ‘potential for other people to get involved and not just the one guidance counsellor’. He also highlighted the importance of teachers in providing career guidance at Junior Cycle level, while he felt his role was to provide ‘more focused guidance activities for third years upwards’. In addition the guidance
counsellor explained that Junior Cycle students are introduced to guidance activities through the SPHE programme, although he is not involved in the delivery of the programme.

Family members were listed as being influential stakeholders in the whole school approach to guidance counselling by all three interviewees, more so for educational guidance. With regards to subject choice, the Principal pointed out that parents and siblings are important in student’s decision making ‘I’d say the home is very important….what brothers and sisters done’. Furthermore, there was consensus amongst all three interviewees that parents/guardians are the first port of call for situations of concern with students. They are usually advised to take their child to their local General Practitioner for referrals to external agencies such as CAMHS.

With regards to the role of students in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school, there appears to be an absence of direct student contributions at present. Each of the interviewees confirmed that students form a Student Council comprising two students from each year group who meet with a teacher once a month. From this forum the students can bring issues to the Principal. The Deputy Principal explained that the WSE-MLL report recommended the school engage more solidly with the student voice through the Student Council system. Furthermore, she felt students do not always elect the most vocal of students to the Students Council which can impact on whether their voices are heard. The guidance counsellor also reiterated the role of the Student Council, as well as more informal requests from students during class, if they wanted certain topics to be covered in the guidance classes. While the interviewees reported that students may not directly contribute to guidance planning, the guidance counsellor explained that they can indirectly ‘have a say’ in planning through their parents, as all school policies, including the Guidance Plan, are sent home to parents.

Finally, the role of external agencies and community stakeholders in a whole school approach to guidance was also emphasised as being very important by the interviewees, especially in relation to both the career and counselling dimensions of the service. The guidance counsellor referred to community agencies, local businesses, universities and PLC education centres as a valuable source of support and information for students and parents alike. Students rely on local community
enterprises for work experience to help them with their career decision making. As part of the counselling dimension of the guidance service, strong links with external agencies including the local GP, NEPS, CAMHS, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists are vital. The Deputy Principal described events, for example the Mental Health Week initiative which is coordinated by the guidance counsellor and involves organisations such as Aware, Console and the Samaritans visiting the school, as part of a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

(iii) Guidance planning, service delivery and referral procedures in the case school

Whole school involvement in drawing up the Guidance Plan appeared to be minimal with responsibility for its development lying predominantly with the guidance counsellor. The current Guidance Plan was devised by the guidance counsellor in the previous year with the since retired guidance counsellor. The Guidance Plan, as with all school policies, is disseminated to the Principal, teachers, parents and BOM for approval. Whilst the guidance counsellor explained that ideally all stakeholders should be involved in the development of the Guidance Plan, this is not always possible due to individuals busy schedules. Furthermore, staff tend to respond to policies they feel are relevant to them. This point was also echoed by the Principal, who when asked about the input of other stakeholders and staff into developing the Guidance Plan, explained that staff tend to ‘get involved in the policies that affect them’. The school’s Code of Behaviour is the only policy document that all staff contribute to.

In relation to the delivery of guidance within the curriculum there are notable variations across the curriculum years. According to the Principal and guidance counsellor, timetabled guidance classes are provided to the Transition Years groups, Senior Cycle groups and the PLC groups. In addition to timetabled classes, half of the guidance counsellor’s hours are available for one-to-one guidance counselling. The guidance counsellor explained that the timetabled guidance classes encompass a variety of education and career related topics relevant to the student groups including progression options, college and course application procedures, occupation assessments, funding opportunities, and career interest inventories. Students are also brought to University, Institutes of Technology and College Open Days. In addition, an annual Careers Night is held for 5th Year and Leaving Certificate students and their parents which involves attendance by speakers from different HE colleges.
Conversely, there was divergence amongst the three interviewees in relation to their understanding of how guidance is delivered to the Junior Cycle year groups. The Deputy Principal maintained that all year groups had one guidance class per week following recommendations in WSE-MLL report. This was disputed by the Principal and the guidance counsellor who explained that formal student contact with the guidance service does not occur until 3rd year. In relation to 1st years, the guidance counsellor explained that whilst a six week induction programme for first years was previously in existence, this is no longer the case, due to time constraints. Initial contact is made with prospective 1st years in February prior to their entry into the school through an entrance exam which is the first assessment that is carried out with them. When they enter the school each student has an individual meeting with the guidance counsellor that concentrates on their CAT score, subjects, career aspirations and settling in to the school. From 1st to 3rd year students can make informal requests for a meeting with the guidance counsellor, or they may be formally referred to the service through the SST structures.

In third year Junior Cycle students engage formally with the guidance service through the completion of the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) in December each year. Following this, the guidance counsellor meets with students individually between January and mid-February to discuss the DATS results before they choose their subjects for Senior Cycle. It is important to note that the guidance counsellor had been absent for the six weeks immediately preceding the Christmas holidays in 2014 and the students received their DATs results slightly later than usual in the New Year. In this situation priority was given to those students who were due to go straight into fifth year in autumn 2015 (approximately 50 students). The absence of formal career guidance provision in the Junior Cycle was referred to by the Principal who explained that the DES had noted that a number of students wanted to repeat 5th year as they had ‘picked the wrong subjects’ and that this may be connected to the level of provision of guidance counselling to students. Bearing in mind the erosion of the 22 hours of teaching in the school, the Principal responded...‘so you know we say give it to us and we’ll give it to them’.

The guidance counsellor is heavily involved in the pastoral care of students in the case school. In the event of a critical incident, the Principal explained that a ‘ladder of support’ exists within the
school. The Principal and Deputy Principal contacts four Assistant Principals each and these Assistant Principal’s contact the other relevant stakeholders. A critical incident meeting is convened with the guidance counsellor also in attendance.

With regard to referral systems in the school, all three interviewees agreed that they were very effective from informal referrals within the school, to more ‘formal’ referrals out to external agencies. Internal referrals come from a number of sources. For example, a student might confide something to another student who then may disclose the issue to a teacher or class tutor. Following this the class tutor contacts the Year Head or goes directly to the Deputy Principal. The Deputy Principal reported that one to one sessions are always prioritised in the school. If a student makes a serious disclosure, for example, suicidal ideation, even if the Guidance Counsellor is timetabled to teach a class he is freed up to attend to the student. Although this is a rare occurrence, in such a situation the Principal or Deputy Principal covers his timetabled class in order to free him up to provide one to one support. Each of the three interviewees reported that a student can also self-refer by requesting a meeting with the guidance counsellor. Referrals may also come via the Deputy Principal through a Year Head who has a concern about a particular student. In this case, the student might be referred directly to the guidance counsellor.

Referrals to external agencies are managed by the Principal (Designated Liaison Person) and the Deputy Principal (Deputy Liaison Person). Although, as the Principal pointed out, generally parents are advised to take their child to the local GP, as they will likely have to refer them to other agencies, such as Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Nonetheless, referral systems to agencies such as CAMHS or Health Service Executive (HSE) social workers can be hampered by the agencies’ confidentiality clauses. This can mean that, following a referral to an external agency, the school might often be unaware of whether a case is being dealt with or not, or the outcome of the case.

(iv) **Provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school since Budget 2012**

The three interviewees were asked to indicate whether there had been any changes to the provision of guidance counselling within the case school since Budget 2012, and to identify the key
challenges of providing a quality guidance service under the current DES guidelines. At the time of Budget 2012, the school had two part time guidance counsellors with 23-24 hours of guidance between them. The Principal explained ‘we went from that to zero...so that was a huge shock to the system... that was a loss of teaching time...straight loss of teaching time’. The impact of this on the school is that the students have ‘lost out’ due to larger classes, and ‘less options’. He reported that the removal of subjects from the curriculum is one of the consequences of the re-allocation, as the school no longer has the staff to provide them. Students who wish to take these subjects must pay for them privately. Furthermore, the loss of teaching time and subsequent reduction in staff has resulted in larger class groups, as well as joining of honours and pass classes in some cases. He described this as ‘a huge loss’, and voiced concerns over the support given to students. According to the Principal this impact is felt across all student groups from ‘the brighter pupil’ to ‘the weaker pupil’. In addition, he stressed the constant need for guidance counselling, and the importance of the availability of the guidance counsellor. There is ‘always someone in difficulty’, and while reasons for counselling can range from ‘not eating a breakfast to bullying’, the need to provide appropriate support and counselling is ‘constant and on-going’. Although he has to adhere to the 1998 Education Act and provide appropriate guidance, it is difficult to do this without an allocation.

When asked about the challenges of his role in light of the 2012 Budget re-allocation, the key concern for the guidance counsellor is having insufficient time to meet the demands of the role ‘well I guess it’s time really... trying to get everything done’. The role has become much busier. Between January and February he has to meet all 3rd years individually to give them their DATS results and discuss their subject choices, and interview all 5th years for LCVP. In addition, he has to ensure he is available to meet with any Leaving Certificate students who might panic coming up to CAO deadlines. He stated ‘so all of that on top of anything else that might happen....So it’s just... it’s just layer upon layer upon layer you know?’ Consequently, the guidance counsellor identified the need for efficient time management skills in order to provide as effective a service as possible. Furthermore, he is required to teach two subject classes per week, time that he feels could be better used towards providing extra guidance classes or extra sessions for individual counselling.
(v) Conclusion

To conclude, four key themes emerged in the individual interviews with the Principal, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor. All three agreed that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school at present. As part of this approach the current Year Head structure and the presence of SST’s is highly regarded by all three and an important element of guidance counselling provision. School staff and the external community and agencies also play a role in a more indirect way. However, whole school involvement in the development of the Guidance Plan appears to be a more complex issue. In spite of the opportunities afforded to the staff by the guidance service and school management to engage in school policy making, it would appear that they may only concentrate on the policies that directly affect them.

Whilst the three interviewees were in agreement that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school they acknowledged the difficulties of providing an effective guidance service through the current allocation. There was consensus that the guidance counsellor does not have sufficient time to carry out all of the necessary guidance activities, and the lack of guidance provision at Junior Cycle appears to be a significant challenge. The consequences of the removal of ex-quota allocation within the school in 2012 has given rise to the allocation being taken from within regular teaching hours resulting in larger classes, joining of honours and pass classes, as well as the removal of some subjects from the curriculum due to under-staffing. Furthermore, the increased workload for the guidance counsellor may be having an impact on Year Heads leading to frustration or reluctance to take up these posts amongst teaching staff.

(b) Student Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held with a randomly selected group of Junior Cycle students (n9), all from third year, and another group of Senior Cycle students (n9), all from 6th year. Each group contained five female and four male students. Each focus group lasted 35 minutes, during which time students were asked a number of guiding questions from the individual focus group interview frameworks. All of the students were afforded opportunities to respond to the questions put
forward by the focus group facilitator. The following section presents the synthesised findings generated from both focus groups through the four key themes that emerged in the analysis.

(i) Sources of guidance counselling for students in the case school

A number of sources of personal, educational and vocational guidance in the school were identified by the focus group students, both internally and externally. Some distinctions were made by the students between the different aspects of guidance. In relation to personal guidance, in the Senior Cycle group one student reported that he associated the guidance service with academic and career guidance, but not with personal guidance. One Senior Cycle student had received personal support from the guidance service which he found very helpful at the time. A number of students in the group stated they may not necessarily go to the guidance service with a personal issue. One female student pointed out that the lack of a female guidance counsellor in the school might prevent some female students to seek support from the guidance service. A number of the Senior Cycle students agreed they would be more likely to approach other staff members with personal issues. Each of the students in the Senior Cycle group had identified a ‘go-to person’ whom they were comfortable to approach for personal issues. One student explained ‘so it might be like a teacher you felt closer to’.

Some of the Senior Cycle students stated that their class tutors and Year Heads were their ‘go-to person’. A female student reported having spoken to the Deputy Principal about a student who was being bullied and found this extremely helpful. She felt that personal issues were best discussed with ‘someone who has more power’ in the school. While Senior Cycle students spoke freely about who they would approach for personal guidance, Junior Cycle students were more reticent about the issue. The Junior Cycle students reported they had never sought advice from the guidance service or any other staff in this regard.

With regards to educational and vocational guidance, in addition to receiving guidance from the guidance service, some students stated that different teaching staff do provide educational guidance through information about subject choices and subject-related career opportunities. Some students reported that they are encouraged to seek advice from relevant subject teachers
when making subject choices. Information about Transition Year is provided by the Transition Year Coordinator, who also provides information on all choices including LCA, LCVP and 5th year. When asked about work experience in Transition Year, one Junior Cycle student explained ‘well you make your choice about where you want to go and then it helps you with like whether you might want to do it after school and stuff’.

The Junior Cycle students stated that they have timetabled SPHE classes which are delivered by subject teachers and include topics such as stress management, time management and study. When asked to elaborate on the types of stress management techniques taught in SPHE, one student explained that they were taught techniques to manage their emotional responses. Furthermore, the importance of exercise, sport and keeping fit was emphasised in the SPHE curriculum.

Finally, with regard to external sources of guidance counselling, four Senior Cycle students had availed of guidance from an external private guidance counsellor and one Junior Cycle student had an upcoming appointment scheduled. Generally, the private appointments consisted of a two hour session involving psychometric assessment and guidance on suitable career areas and course options. One student reported feeling it was of enormous benefit to him:

‘I kind of found out things that I wouldn’t have really known and...it really gave me the chance to think about what I really want to do. And it made me feel more settled about my course choices’.

Some students concurred that private guidance was helpful to them as the school guidance service may not, as one student stated, ‘have the time to do that individually with all the 106 students in 6th year’. In addition to private guidance counselling, some of the students also reported that parents and siblings are helpful in their academic and course choice decision making.

(ii) Guidance counselling in the case school curriculum

In relation to guidance provision (individual and class-based) to the Junior and Senior Cycle groups, differences emerged in the data. All Senior Cycle students, with the exception of one student who had recently entered the school, reported having an individual appointment with the guidance counsellor at least once, and some of them more than once. Conversely, only one student from the
Junior Cycle group had met with the guidance counsellor to date through self-referral to discuss subject choice. The students from both focus groups reported knowing who the guidance counsellor was and the location of the guidance service office. While there was consensus amongst Senior Cycle students that they could make direct appointments with the guidance counsellor, there was uncertainty about this amongst the Junior Cycle group. Some Junior Cycle students reported that they could personally request an appointment, others did not know how to make an appointment.

Access to the guidance service through class based guidance may be the first point of contact with students. Although the majority of the Junior Cycle students confirmed that guidance classes were not provided at Junior Cycle, a small number of Senior Cycle students reported that they had had some guidance classes in first year to help them with subject choice. Some of the Junior Cycle students reported they had not met with the guidance counsellor/s in first year, however, when the focus group interview had finished, some of the students returned to the interview room to explain that they had, in fact, been called out of their classroom in first year for an individual meeting with the guidance counsellor.

One Senior Cycle student reported that the main contact for Junior Cycle students with the guidance service transpires in 3rd year through the administration of the DATS for guidance on their Leaving Certificate subject choice. However, this student stated that students had received the DATS test results after the subject choice process ‘and so a lot of us were filling out our Leaving Cert subjects shooting in the dark, not knowing what we were gonna do afterwards’. For another Senior Cycle student decisions in relation to his subject choice may been more comprehensive if there was more time to consider the DATS results.

The key interaction between the school guidance service and Junior Cycle is through the administration of the DATS in 3rd year. At the time of the focus groups, the Junior Cycle students had completed the DATS in December 2014. The DATS results are only administered by the guidance counsellor in a one to one session with the student. With 108 students in Junior Cycle, some of Junior Cycle students voiced concerns that there may not be sufficient time to provide the
results to them before the deadline for choosing their Senior Cycle subjects. The majority of Junior Cycle students in the focus group appeared to be unaware of the purpose of the DATS test. While one student explained ‘It’s for finding out what you’re good at’, others reported not having any knowledge of its purpose. Another student explained ‘They said something about our careers and something….but they didn’t really explain it properly’.

(iii) Guidance counselling activities in Junior and Senior Cycle in the case school

In the case school priority is given to the provision of classroom based guidance in the Senior Cycle. In relation to choosing subjects for Senior Cycle, the Junior Cycle students reported talking to the subject teachers about the particular subject more so than the Guidance Counsellor. However, a small number of the Senior Cycle students reported having had career guidance classes in 1st and 2nd year. The class topics included ICT careers guidance, e.g. Qualifax, as well as lessons regarding aptitude tests and preferences.

Amongst the Senior Cycle group students appeared to be confused about the activities covered with them. Although some students had researched UCAS courses during guidance class, others stated it was after the early application deadline for veterinary and medicine. Some of them reported researching UCAS courses on the website themselves. One student felt he would have liked to have received more guidance on the HPAT process. Some students felt that despite having knowledge about the courses they wish to pursue, they needed more one to one guidance during this important period in the school year.

Regarding choosing their Senior Cycle options, the Junior Cycle students had different reasons for doing Transition Year. One student explained he did not want to do any work. Parental influence appears to be a factor in choosing Senior Cycle options for some. One student explained her parents felt she would be too young finishing school, a viewpoint she did not necessarily agree with. Another student felt that she needed an extra year to mature. Contradictory views were held by other students who articulated they wanted to get out of school as quickly as possible. In addition, four of the students expressed a wish to do the LCVP, while none of them wished to do the LCA. One Senior Cycle student wished to take a year out after school to work before going to college, a decision already discussed with his parents.
The topic of subject choices was an important point of discussion for the Senior Cycle students. Some of them felt that there was a need for guidance as early as primary school when students are required to make their subject choices for the Junior Certificate. One student reported that he had based his decisions on his friend’s choices and felt this was a waste as he is no longer doing any of these subjects. He argued that career guidance should be central at this point ‘like you don’t really know what you’d like at that stage. But that’s where the career guidance should help’. Another Senior Cycle student reported choosing subjects based on his abilities ‘I’m kind of practical so I picked mostly practical subjects’. Interestingly, many of the Junior Cycle students felt that at this stage in their third year in school they did not need to be ‘sure’ about careers after school.

Junior Cycle students reported they had to choose their subjects in sixth class in primary school before entering the case school. An Open Night in the case school provided them with the opportunity to observe some of the post primary students engaging in the subjects. However, some of them claimed that no specific information was given to them on the night; rather they were encouraged to look around. On further probing, one student revealed that information may have been provided on a hand-out. The guidance service was also present at the Open Night and whilst information was not directly presented to students directly, they were encouraged to approach the guidance counsellor for advice and guidance.

(iv) Student perspectives on guidance provision in the case school

In the final part of the focus groups, students provided their views on guidance provision in the school. In relation to the Senior Cycle group, a number of students felt they had benefitted from the guidance they had received. One student found guidance ‘quite beneficial. I had no real idea about what I wanted to do and he supported and gave me courses that he believed I would be good at or interested in so I thought that was kind of good’.

A number of students articulated they needed a more expanded guidance service. For example, one student felt he required more concrete advice on his choices for the CAO and sought it outside of the school ‘...within the CAO system that’s the role of the guidance counsellor and that’s not really provided here I don’t think’. Another student who had attended a private guidance
counsellor felt he had been provided with definitive options for college courses by the practitioner, whilst the school guidance service provided more general options of career sectors or broad course areas. An additional student who attended a private guidance counsellor said he did so because although he already had his number one CAO choice picked, he felt that he was left to try and fill in the rest of the CAO form on his own. As the Junior Cycle students had had limited contact with the guidance service so far they did not provide any specific feedback.

There was a general consensus amongst both focus groups that career guidance appears to be something that is provided to Senior Cycle more so than Junior Cycle in the case school. One Junior Cycle student explained ‘it’s mostly for Leaving Cert students……they get appointments for guidance counselling, but Junior Cert students don’t’. This was something that was echoed by all of the Senior Cycle students. In particular, the lack of guidance at Junior Cycle was difficult for the students who felt they had to rely more on external sources of guidance and advice in order to get information to inform their decision making around subject choice and careers. One suggestion was to have a timetabled guidance class in the Junior Cycle to introduce students to these activities:

‘We could have a class or something, where you go through college courses subject choices or stuff. Cos we don’t know any information around them and we’ve to get that outside of the school, we don’t get that inside of the school’.

Such opinions are supported by the fact that only half of the Junior Cycle group had any knowledge of the CAO system. Those who did had learned about it from parents and siblings, as well as having investigated it online themselves. One student explained ‘I was just looking up college courses and it said CAO points so I just looked that up as well to see what it was’. Half of this group expressed having no knowledge of the CAO whatsoever.

The students in both groups provided some suggestions to enhance school guidance provision. The Junior Cycle students articulated that prior to entering 5th year enhanced levels of guidance on subject choice and career options would be beneficial to students in the case school. A general consensus across both groups was that guidance provision needed to be introduced at Junior Cycle level. One Senior Cycle student was concerned that inadequate provision of guidance at second level might impact on success at undergraduate level, and possibly influence whether a student
would stay in college or drop out. Some Senior Cycle students argued for the need to broaden their choices through the provision of more information on options outside of their own specific course choice. One Senior Cycle student suggested the provision of open access hours by the guidance service at a certain time in the event that a student was free to call to the guidance service, i.e. a type of drop in service.

Further suggestions included the addition of another guidance counsellor which would provide increased options for one to one guidance sessions for students. Some female students voiced that a guidance counsellor of both genders might encourage more female students to engage with the guidance service. Similarly male students might feel more comfortable talking to male members of the guidance service and teaching staff.

Some students also felt that emphasis needed to be placed on career guidance from the first day they enter post primary school and students should be encouraged to explore their options over time. One Senior Cycle student emphasised that the learning environment in which guidance is delivered is difficult describing the 35 minute career guidance class as ‘the wrong environment’, and guidance classes might be better replaced by one to one sessions. Finally, another Senior Cycle student distinguished between the role of the guidance counsellor and the guidance service and the possible challenges of provision when resources are constrained ‘He’s a good career guidance counsellor. But he doesn’t have…. I suppose… the facilities… the time… maybe funding… I don’t know I imagine maybe funding comes into it.

(v) Conclusion

To conclude, with regard to a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school, students rely on a number of sources for guidance and information to help them in their educational and career related decision making. The sources include guidance counsellors (both internal and external), subject teachers, and the TY coordinator, as well as parents, siblings and other students. A number of sources were also listed as providing personal guidance, including the guidance counsellor, subject teachers, Deputy Principal, Year Heads and class tutors. However, this
engagement is linked to the varying levels of guidance provision across the curriculum years which emerged as a key issue in the two focus groups.

In general, students expressed satisfaction with the school guidance service, but highlighted some areas that could be enhanced further. In particular, the limited provision in Junior Cycle, also reported by the Principal and the guidance counsellor, was confirmed by students in both groups and appeared to be a particular concern. In addition, the lack of guidance provision in the absence of the guidance counsellor for a few weeks in the autumn was raised as it coincided with specific decision-making during this period.

There was also a general consensus amongst the two groups of students that guidance provision would be beneficial across all of the year groups and from the time students enter school in first year. This needs to be in the form of guidance classes at Junior Cycle, and an increase in the number of one to one sessions to discuss subject and career options in Senior Cycle. It was also acknowledged by some of the students that the re-allocated resources to guidance provision may be challenging for the school.

(c) Teaching and Support Staff Online Questionnaire
This section will present the statistical and qualitative findings from the online questionnaire administered to 46 teaching and support staff in the case school. The final response rate was 39% (n=18) of which 61.11% (n=11) were female and 38.89% (n=7) were male. It is important to note that some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and where necessary the number of respondents is highlighted throughout. The findings will be presented in line with the structure of the online questionnaire which was divided into four different thematic sections.

(i) Demographical information on respondents
All of the respondents to the survey were members of the teaching staff. None of the support staff responded to it. The length of time respondents had been teaching at the school varies, see Chart 1.
The highest number of respondents have been teaching in the case school for 15-20 years (n=5), four for 3-5 years, three for more than 20 years, three for 6-10 years and two for 10-14 years. Just one respondent has been teaching in the school between 0-2 years.

*Chart 2* outlines the student groups that the respondents teach. The majority of them teach 1*st*, 2*nd* and 3*rd* years, as well as 5*th* and 6*th* years. A further 11 teach Transition Year, while three teach PLC students.
(ii) **A whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school**

Participants were asked to explain their understanding of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling and to indicate whether they believed it was evident in the case school at present. In terms of understanding, various definitions of a whole school approach to guidance counselling emerged in the data. Some respondents pointed to the interaction between Year Heads and the guidance counsellor through the weekly SST meetings, or through the referral process to the guidance counsellor. Others pointed to the involvement of all staff in supporting students from a holistic point of view. One teacher defined a whole school approach to guidance counselling as:

‘I think that it means that all staff members are meant to be involved in the pastoral care of students in our care. That includes holding them accountable for their actions, as well as guidance in terms of subject choice and level, careers and so on. The latter (career) element is more specialised’.

Another staff member defined a whole school approach to guidance counselling as promoting the school ethos through the encouragement of students by all staff members and the provision of extra support for students where necessary. On-going collaborative discussions between staff and students about possible career options that allow students to ‘explore ideas, and share hopes and fears for their future lives’ was also highlighted as a key feature of a whole school approach to guidance counselling by one respondent.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt there was currently a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in the school. Of the 14 respondents who answered this question, 11 agreed that there was, whilst three stated there was not. One respondent stated that formal career guidance and subject guidance is left to the guidance counsellor. Furthermore, the respondent elaborated that pastoral care activities amongst staff members has diminished somewhat in the school due to ‘too much form filling’. In contrast, another respondent stated that ‘all teachers have an interest in the Pastoral Care of students’. A number of respondents highlighted the guidance counsellor as the official provider of guidance and the ‘go to person’ for formal provision of guidance or for support with discipline issues, or problems at home.

A number of respondents emphasised that the whole school approach relates to all staff having an interest in the career choices of students and is some cases staff provide advice to students. One
stated that they ‘often refer to careers and outline the education, career path and employment details’ in the classroom, while leaving the ‘official’ guidance to the guidance counsellor. According to the guidance counsellor, guidance provision in the PLC college is one 35 minute class, and two one-to-one sessions, if needed, per week. One respondent from the PLC college felt that due to the small amount of PLC staff (one full-time and 3 part-time tutors) communication between the staff is very effective. There is a particular focus on staff’s ability to communicate student difficulties and increase awareness amongst the team. However, due to the limited amount of hours for formal guidance, ‘…much of the counselling required in the college falls back on teaching staff (who are not on-paper trained for this role)’ and occasionally external referral is made to meet the counselling needs of students in the PLC college.

Respondents were asked to identify from a list of potential stakeholders who are involved in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school, see Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>% of teacher responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Tutors</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counsellor</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Head</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Management</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Association</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Teacher</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs Assistants</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Stakeholders involved in whole school approach to guidance counselling

The guidance counsellor was ranked highest by the majority of respondents (n13), followed by Year Heads (n12); subject teachers (n11) and the Deputy Principal (n10). Nine of the respondents
indicated both class tutors and the Principal’s involvement. Lower levels of involvement included both resource teachers and SNA’s (n5); the Parents Association (n4); the Board of Management (n3), whilst just two indicated the DES. Interestingly, two respondents also referred to the Home School Liaison Officer and the School Chaplain, neither of which are present in the school.

Respondents were also requested to specify their own role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. One teacher indicated playing no role, whilst another was unsure. An additional respondent claimed that ‘management has not articulated to me my role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling’. Other respondents reported that they played a role in pastoral care, academic development and discipline, with one respondent stated ‘balancing all three is impossible. At best you can nudge students in the right direction, or flag situations that you are concerned about’. Another teacher identified the role as one of referral to the guidance counsellor in the event of issues arising for students. Giving advice on a subject area was identified by one teacher, while another is directly involved as a Year Head and member of the SST. In addition, listening to student’s difficulties and being aware of student’s needs, as well as challenging high achievers, were some of the other roles articulated by some respondents.

In relation to levels of awareness by staff of a published school Guidance Plan, only eight responded to this question definitively with five indicating they were aware of its existence whilst three were not. An additional five respondents elaborated that they were unsure as to whether it existed, as they had not seen it or received a copy of it. Nine responded to the question on whom is involved in drawing up the school Guidance Plan. Four specified the guidance counsellor and one the special needs assistant (SNA). One indicated that this question was not applicable as there was no Guidance Plan in place in the school. An additional three respondents were either unsure about who was involved or as to whether a Plan existed.

(iii) Guidance counselling provision in the case school

Participants were asked about their understanding of the term guidance counselling in the context of school provision. Whereas some of them described it as giving advice and information about career choices, others highlighted the role of pastoral care in the work. One teacher defined guidance counselling as ‘a mix of pastoral care, career guidance and some involvement/assistance
with students in or near a critical incident type situation’. The notion of supporting students through difficulties and personal problems was highlighted by a number of respondents in conjunction with the provision of career-related advice and information. One teacher highlighted projects carried out in their particular class, emphasising discussion of how the project choice is linked with personal skills and possible career choice, and providing advice on relevant internal and external contacts (e.g. other teachers or local businesses).

A number of themes emerged in relation to the function of the school guidance service within the context of a whole school approach. Whilst some staff reported that the guidance service serves to help students make career and subject choices; others offered a more holistic view in that the service is to ‘guide students in all aspects of life’. In addition, the information giving function of the guidance service was emphasised strongly by some teachers. One teacher considered the role of the guidance service is to act as a medium of communication between students and teachers.

Participants were then asked to indicate whether they believe any aspects of guidance counselling are more important than others. Overall, 61% responded to this question of which 22% felt that some aspects were more important, whilst 39% felt that they were not. On elaboration, some teachers felt that it depended on the student and the nature of the situation. One stated that helping students to explore their fears for the future was more important, while for another ‘encouraging high achievement’ was the most important aspect.

*Chart 3* illustrates the perceptions of the teachers on the prioritisation of the guidance counselling activities in the case school. Vocational guidance counselling is ranked as being the most important, followed by educational guidance counselling, with personal guidance counselling being ranked as least important.
The participants were also asked to indicate when a student might need guidance counselling. Some respondents interpreted this question to mean the timeline within which students might require it, whilst others explained the reasons students attend the guidance service. With regards to the timeline, one teacher argued they continuously need guidance counselling. Similarly, another stated they needed it throughout every year of school, but that the type of guidance counselling might differ at different stages. Another suggested that students need guidance counselling once a year from 2\textsuperscript{nd} year onwards; once a term from 5\textsuperscript{th} year and once a month from 6\textsuperscript{th} year. Whilst some respondents focused on educational reasons for guidance, others emphasised personal motives for guidance. Educational reasons include the need for assistance on subject choice, career choice, Leaving Certificate course options (e.g. Transition Year, LCA, LCVP, and standard Leaving Certificate), college course options, exams and uncertainty about their future. Personal reasons consisted of bereavement, bullying, low self-esteem and problems in the home (e.g. addiction, separation).

In questions 16 and 17, respondents were also asked to identify the main activities of the school guidance service with both curriculum cycles, \textit{Charts 4 and 5}. 

![Chart 3: Prioritisation of activities by the guidance service](image-url)
Q16 What are the main activities carried out by the school guidance service with Junior Cycle Students? Please tick all that apply:

Answered: 11  Skipped: 7

Chart 4: Guidance activities with Junior Cycle students

Q17 What are the main activities carried out by the school guidance service with Senior Cycle Students? Please tick all that apply:

Answered: 11  Skipped: 7

Chart 5: Guidance activities with Senior Cycle students
Counselling was listed as the main activity in both cycles with a slightly higher percentage awarded to Senior Cycle (n10) than Junior Cycle (n8). Respondents also listed information giving as a main activity, again with higher percentages seen in Senior Cycle (n9) than Junior Cycle (n6). Respondents indicated that assessments were carried out more with Junior Cycle students (n7) than Senior Cycle students (n6). However, according to the respondents Senior Cycle students (n10) receive more advice than Junior Cycle (n5) students. Similar disparities were seen in the level of work on career transition programmes between Senior Cycle (n8) and Junior Cycle students (n3). Provision of educational development programmes appeared to be low for both Senior Cycle (n3) and Junior Cycle (n1) students. Personal and social development programmes appeared to be the same across both cycles (n5).

(iv) **A whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school since Budget 2012**

Staff reported on the impact of the Budget 2012 reallocation of resources within the case school. In total 87.5% (n=7) agreed that there had been significant changes, while only 12.5% (n=1) did not. On elaboration, a number of staff highlighted the loss of the other guidance counsellor in the school. Many respondents felt that this was the biggest impact of the reallocation. In addition, some of them stated that there were less hours available for guidance counselling now. One stated that ‘the guidance counsellor, who is great, can’t do as much and teach 22 hours’. Furthermore, a PLC college respondent indicated that guidance counselling provision was being impacted upon in the PLC college and this has implications for the college resources which are occasionally drawn upon to fund the provision of external counselling services for students.

Participants were asked to comment on the major challenges of providing a quality guidance service in the school since the re-allocation. In terms of the availability of adequate resources, 70% (n=7) indicated that the school does not have them, whilst 30% (n=3) of respondents believe it does. A number of respondents elaborated on this point explaining that the lack of a Home School Liaison Officer, and an additional guidance counsellor, in particular a female guidance counsellor, is noteworthy. Also, the lack of manpower and time to identify and support students in need poses major challenges for school staff. One respondent explained there are ‘too many who require help, too little to give help, and too little time to help’. In addition the ‘lack of awareness by Government as to its importance within the school community’ was articulated by one teacher.
With regard to the communication and collaboration processes between the school staff and guidance service, the findings are varied. *Chart 6* displays the results from 10 respondents. Only one participant regarded the current communication processes between staff and the guidance service as “Excellent”. Two equally as “Good”, “Average” or “Fair” respectively, whilst three respondents regarded it as “Poor”.

![Chart 6: Communication processes](image)

*Chart 7* displays the results on collaboration between school staff and the guidance service. Two regarded it as “Excellent”, one as “Good”, two as both “Average” and “Fair”, and three as “Poor”.

![Chart 7: Collaboration processes](image)
In terms of referral of students by staff to the guidance service, of the 10 who responded to this question the majority (n9) indicated they “Occasionally” refer students, whilst one “Frequently” does so. However, only two respondents stated there were clear guidelines for referral, whilst eight reported that there were not. One respondent explained that a class teacher reports to the Year Head, who meets with the guidance counsellor at the weekly SST meetings. Another stated that referrals occur on an informal basis. Interestingly, this respondent felt that this system possibly works better ‘than yet another form to be filled’. An additional respondent claimed that they were unaware of any guidelines for referral. With regards to the PLC college, one respondent explained that a student would have to be in visible distress before an external counsellor can be called in.

Finally, staff provided information on the strengths and areas for enhancement in relation to guidance provision. The findings were very positive. Some of them listed the availability and expertise of the guidance counsellor as a strength, with a further respondent stating the guidance counsellor is ‘available at all times to students’. One respondent reported that ‘our counsellor is very good, practical and generally steers students in the right direction’, whilst another claimed that ‘requests are never refused’. Additional reported strengths included the knowledge of the guidance counsellor about courses, and his willingness to do research on options. An open and positive school environment was also listed as a strength. This was echoed by a PLC college respondent who stated that the open atmosphere and the garden adjoining the college provides solace to the PLC students.

Concerning areas for enhancement in relation to guidance provision, time and human resources were amongst the areas identified by staff. Further suggestions included additional co-ordination without additional paperwork, an increase in one-to-one guidance counselling and supplementary guidance hours in the guidance allocation. Moreover, some staff recommended greater communication between the guidance service and staff in order to clarify exactly what type of service is being provided. Finally, one respondent felt that extra funding was needed for the PLC college in order to increase its guidance provision.
(v) Conclusion

To conclude, these findings are the views of staff who responded to the survey on the issue of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. The findings indicate that, in general, the teaching staff perceive there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling that involves a number of key stakeholders in the school. A number of respondents highlighted strong provision across the educational and vocational dimensions of guidance counselling, as well as personal guidance and pastoral care support to students. However, some incongruities did emerge in the findings in terms of guidance counselling provision, roles and responsibilities in the school and the communication processes amongst the school staff and guidance service. Some of the specific challenges identified may be as a direct result of the re-allocation of guidance resources within the school since Budget 2012.
Section 6: Case Study Findings

This section presents an interpretation of the findings of this single case study in relation to the primary data (survey, individual interviews and focus groups) and secondary data (documentary evidence) and the literature review. The discussion will address the three research questions underpinning the case study: the delivery of a whole school approach in the case school through structures, roles, responsibilities and activities; current guidance counselling provision within the school curriculum, and the impact of the DES Budget 2012 re-allocation on guidance counselling provision in the school.

(i) Provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school

Recent DES (2103a) policy articulates the need for a more integrated approach to supporting the wellbeing and development of students within the post-primary sector in spite of the radical re-allocation of guidance counselling resources in 2012 (DES, 2012). Given the challenges that have emerged for schools since the 2012 re-allocation in the post primary the case school appears to be relatively successful in relation to the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. As stated in the school’s DES Subject Inspection (Guidance) report and the School Guidance Plan the findings indicate that a particular strength of the approach lies in the guidance service being both a part of, yet having its own distinctness, within the overall pastoral care structures in the school. By and large this arrangement encompasses the SST structure and involves a number of key internal staff, as well as some external stakeholders. In terms of perceptions, all three interviewees and 79% of the staff survey respondents agreed that there is a whole school approach in the school. Where there was divergence, a number of reasons were given including the diminution of pastoral care in the school due to increased paperwork. This, however, would not appear to be in line with the majority of respondents who felt that all staff take an interest in the pastoral care of the students.

There was general consensus amongst the three interviewees that a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school involves the school community as well as the guidance counsellor. In line with the NCGE (2004) and DES (2005a, 2012) a number of stakeholders were
identified as being contributory to a whole school approach including the guidance counsellor; the Principal; Deputy Principal; Year Heads; class tutors; teachers; support staff; students; parents; siblings and peers. Furthermore, external agencies such as universities, PLC colleges, the local community, social workers, GP’s, psychological services including NEPS and CAMHS, and other voluntary organisations such as Console and the Samaritans. In addition, external private guidance counselling was identified as beneficial by some students.

Additionally, the three interviewees concurred that the school’s SST structure promotes an inclusive, integrated and holistic system of support of students’ personal, social, educational and career guidance needs. The notion of staff working collaboratively was stressed by the Deputy Principal as being central to the whole school approach to guidance provision in the school at present. The guidance counsellor does not work in isolation; rather the Year Heads, Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor work closely together to support students. This involves highlighting individual student issues and referral of students to appropriate members of staff including the Deputy Principal and guidance counsellor. On the other hand, some staff members reported being unaware of the Guidance Plan and referral procedures to the guidance service.

With regards to educational and career guidance, students are also encouraged to seek advice from teachers about specific subjects in tandem with guidance provided by the guidance counsellor, a proposition espoused by the DES (2012). With regard to personal and social guidance, the specific pastoral care structure of having two SST’s who meet weekly to discuss students appears to work well in general. The Deputy Principal and the guidance counsellor also attend these weekly meetings where possible. The focus of the meetings is not to discuss discipline concerns, unless a student has a re-occurring discipline issue that the management team feel is stemming from a personal issue.

A number of individual contributors to the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school were identified in the findings. Each of these contributors will be considered in turn. In relation to the roles and responsibilities, the IGC (2008) delineates key
aspects of the work of the professional guidance counsellor centred on a triad approach of personal, educational and career guidance counselling.

In the case school, the guidance counsellor articulated his role as one of introducing students to each of the different aspects of guidance counselling within a tight curriculum timeframe. He is allocated 19 hours and 40 minutes weekly for the delivery of the guidance service through a variety of activities including the provision of educational and vocational guidance in class, as well as personal guidance through individual sessions. He is particularly responsible for ‘more focused guidance activities for third years upwards’, and for the development of a yearly Guidance Plan which is informed by relevant DES circulars. In the findings, members of staff viewed the role as dealing with CAO points and providing information to students and staff and guidance on subject areas, subject choice and career options. This was something that was echoed by a number of the focus group students. Though some students felt that the guidance counsellor’s role is to provide personal counselling, others did not hold this viewpoint. The view of the Principal was that the personal counselling element of the role as one of a ‘holding’ process for students until they can access external professional counselling services. In addition, the Deputy Principal stated that the guidance counsellor acts a support to the school management team.

The 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling has placed the responsibility of resourcing the guidance service firmly with the case school management (DES, 2012). The guidance counsellor identified the management role as providing the support and resources in order to provide an effective guidance service. The Principal’s responsibility appears to be primarily administrative and includes the allocation of guidance hours from within the teaching allocation and the formation of the guidance timetable. Although he plays a role in student information nights, he is not involved in any of the other academic or vocational aspects of guidance within the case school. However, as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) he is responsible for student referrals to external agencies. His role also comprises the administration all school policies including the most recent DES policies that have a bearing on guidance counselling delivery, i.e. *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools; Guidelines for mental health promotion and suicide prevention* and the *Action Plan on Bullying* (DES, 2013a, 2013b).
In contrast, the Deputy Principal appears to have a more pastoral care role and acts as a conduit of support and information exchange within the pastoral care structures in the school and the guidance service. Her responsibilities are more closely aligned with the personal and social aspects of guidance counselling as she manages the SST’s and as Deputy DLP is also responsible for student referrals to external agencies. She sees herself as an important means of information transfer between staff, both internally within the school and also in passing on information from staff to external agencies and vice versa.

The issue of teaching staff involvement in the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling has become more prominent in recent years. From a policy perspective it is viewed as a measure to address curriculum and student needs during a time of tightened resources (DES, 2012). From a practice perspective, it raises issues about professional role boundaries and workload concerns for school staff (Hearne & Galvin, 2014), a topic that emerged in the findings of this case study. The role of the teaching and support staff in the case school was highlighted as being instrumental to guiding students on subject choice, subject-related career options and elements of personal support, especially in the absence of specific allocated hours to guidance in the Junior Cycle. Furthermore the SPHE programme introduces students to guidance related activities at Junior Cycle. The Transition Year Co-ordinator provides information on Transition Year, as well as other Leaving Certificate options to students. According to the Principal, however, teachers might indirectly influence subject choice as students can determine the specific teacher they will have for a subject and this can influence the subject choices of students.

Nonetheless, divergence emerged in the findings in relation to the views of the teaching staff on their role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Some staff members appear to be unclear of their role, some identify it in terms of academic subject-related guidance, and others view it as one of referral to the guidance counsellor. In addition, some of the staff position their role within the SST structure as a Year Head, whilst others play a role in the overall pastoral care of students. In particular, their supportive role involves listening to student difficulties, being aware of their individual needs and challenging high achievers. For one respondent the balancing of pastoral care, academic development and discipline issues is an impossible task for teachers and the role is
more about ‘flagging situations’. Some teachers reported that they played no role in the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling, while others were unsure. Finally, one respondent reported that his/her role had not been articulated by management.

The role of the student in a whole school approach to guidance counselling appears to be more elusive in the school, an issue highlighted in the schools WSE-MLL. Although there is a Student Council, the school’s WSE-MLL report recommends it could be used more effectively. At the moment the students do not have any direct input into the design of the yearly Guidance Plan. Primarily, the students’ role appears to be more of ‘receivers’ of guidance counselling with limited input into its delivery. Whilst the Junior Cycle students in the focus group appeared reticent about availing of personal guidance from the guidance service, the Senior Cycle students were more forthcoming. Nonetheless, the responsibility for making individual appointments with the guidance service appears to be with the Junior Cycle students themselves. However, some of the students in this study reported that they did not know how to make an appointment with the guidance service.

The views of the Senior Cycle students in their focus group were varied. Whilst a large proportion of the students stated they had met with the guidance counsellor for educational and vocational guidance, a small number of them had also attended an external private guidance counsellor for one to one guidance, particularly concerning CAO options. Furthermore, some of the Senior Cycle students articulated they were happy to seek personal as well as educational and career guidance from the school guidance service, some of them stated they would likely seek another ‘go to’ staff member about a personal issue. Some of the reasons put forward by students include their association of the guidance service with academic and vocational guidance only and the lack of a female guidance counsellor. This corroborates the findings from other data sources that subject teachers, class tutors and Year Heads play a role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling and student wellbeing (DES, 2012; DES, 2013a; 2013b; Headstrong, 2015)

Parents have been identified as contributing to the guidance and transition needs of their children (McCoy et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004). Correspondingly, according to the interviewees and focus group students in this study parents/guardians and siblings play a prominent role in a whole school
approach to guidance counselling. They are the first port of call for any issues concerning the wellbeing of their child. Furthermore, some students identified their parents, as well as their siblings, as influential in their decision making on subject choice, Leaving Certificate options (i.e. Transition Year, LCA, LCVP, 5th year) and college course applications.

One of the key guidance activities in supporting the wellbeing of students is appropriate referral (NCGE, 2004; DES, 2012, 2013a). The case school operates both internal and external referral procedures through a number of different channels that indicate quite well developed relationships and channels of communication. Internally, as part of the pastoral care structures, SST’s reportedly receive informal referrals from a number of different sources. They include information from direct observations by Year Heads; information from teachers or class tutors, or disclosures from the students themselves or their peers. This information is shared amongst the relevant SST who then decide how best to proceed. The Deputy Principal plays a key role in this process as she liaises with individuals and agencies such as social workers, parents and guardians, NEPS and CAMHS. She also communicates any relevant information to the Year Heads and the guidance counsellor. Although, the guidance counsellor sometimes refers to external agencies, the Principal and Deputy Principal reported that they alone are responsible for engaging with them. The role of parents and the local GP appears to be instrumental in referrals to external agencies. In situations where management believe a student might benefit from additional support, parents are contacted and often advised to take their child to their local GP. If parents refuse to do this, the school through the Liaison or Deputy Liaison Officer, might have to make a direct referral to a social worker.

While staff and students can refer to the school guidance service, this may not be as common as expected. The survey findings indicate that the majority of teaching staff ‘occasionally’ refer students to the guidance service, whilst a small amount do so ‘frequently’. However, even though 20% indicated there are clear guidelines for referral to the guidance service, 80% reported the absence of guidelines which points to the need for more clarity on the referral procedures for staff by the guidance service. Some respondents did point to the more informal referral processes within the school, whereby a teacher reports to the Year Head, who then reports to the SST, who then
possibly reports to the guidance counsellor. For one respondent these informal processes work better, as they do not involve as much paperwork as a more formal system might.

(ii) Guidance counselling provision within the case school curriculum

Prior to Budget 2012, there was an allocation of between 23-24 hours of guidance divided evenly between two guidance counsellors on a part-time basis at the case school. The subsequent retirement of one of the guidance counsellors in 2014 did not result in a replacement. The current guidance allocation within the school is 19 hours 40 minutes for one guidance counsellor. As there is no set curriculum for guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools, an issue that attempted to be addressed by the NCCA in 2007, it is the case school’s responsibility to ensure that all aspects of guidance counselling; personal/social, educational and career are incorporated into the curriculum.

One of the key responsibilities of a school guidance service is the creation of a yearly School Guidance Plan that requires the contribution from different school stakeholders (DES, 2005a, 2012; NCGE, 2004). Although the guidance service has a Guidance Plan some of the interviewees and teaching staff indicated they were unaware of its existence. In fact, just half of the teachers in the survey were aware of it, while the remainder reported that they were unsure, or that there was no Guidance Plan in the school. There was also some uncertainty amongst teaching staff as to who is involved in the development of the Guidance Plan. The guidance counsellor explained that the guidance service alone is responsible for it, which was confirmed by the Principal and Deputy Principal. It was the view of the Principal that staff members tend to involve themselves solely with policies that directly affect them. Nonetheless, the interviewees explained that all staff members receive a copy of each policy, before it goes before the Board of Management and can then make submissions should they wish to change it. According to the guidance counsellor, parents/guardians can also make submissions on their own behalf, or on behalf of their students to change policies. Although parents/guardians receive a copy of the school policies it was unclear if they have direct access to the Guidance Plan.

The issue of imbalance in the level of guidance counselling provision between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle has been consistently reported (DES, 2009; McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014).
This anomaly is evident in the case school where the current distribution of guidance activities leans heavily towards provision to Senior Cycle. This concern was reported in the DES Guidance Inspection report with recommendations put forward at the time. From the students’ perspective, some inconsistencies emerged in the data in the reporting of provision in both cycles. The Junior Cycle students considered guidance counselling as something for Senior Cycle students at the moment. Initial contact is made between Junior Cycle students and the guidance service prior to their entry into the school. A School Open Night introduces prospective students to the school, and the guidance counsellor is present should the students have any questions. A six week induction programme had been in place to introduce first years to the guidance service, but no longer exists due to time constraints. The main point of contact, therefore, between Junior Cycle students and the guidance service occurs at the point of the DATS administration in year 3 of Junior Cycle.

Nevertheless, some Senior Cycle students reported differently about their experiences of guidance counselling provision in Junior Cycle. Whereas a small number recounted having guidance classes in first and second year, the majority had not. Of those who reported they had they stated activities such as computer work (i.e. Qualifax) and aptitude tests were covered with them. However, some students were vague about these lessons and reported they did not feel they were relevant to the world of work. As specified by the guidance counsellor some guidance-related activities are introduced to the Junior Cycle students through the SPHE programme but the guidance service is not involved in its delivery. Furthermore, personal counselling sessions are available to all students, including Junior Cycle on a needs basis.

The Senior Cycle students tended to provide minimal information on the content of their timetables guidance classes and there were some variations in the individual responses. Nonetheless, as specified in the school Guidance Plan, the three interviewees reported a wide range of guidance activities with Senior Cycle students including; occupational assessments; career and interest inventories; trips to college Open Days; career information nights for students and families and; individual sessions with students for personal or career guidance. In addition to the secondary curriculum, the guidance service is also responsible for providing guidance to 50 students in the PLC College attached to the school under the DES post-primary allocation system. Although, there are
three 35 minute guidance sessions assigned to the PLC college per week the needs of the students appears to be greater than can be accommodated at times.

Finally, the holistic model of guidance counselling that involves personal and social, educational and career guidance is quite unique to the Irish context (DES, 2005a; Hearne & Galvin, 2014; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004). This model is now in danger of becoming fractured and eroded since the 2012 re-allocation (IGC, 2013, 2014; NCGE, 2013). The recent emphasis by the DES (2012) on the use of more classroom based guidance activities which focus on the dissemination of education and career information to students perpetuates the encroaching paradigm that guidance can be delivered through a didactic pedagogy at the expense of the relational process in one to one guidance work. In the case school, the findings from the interviewees and survey respondents varied with regard to levels of importance and prioritisation of the various aspects and activities of the guidance service. The interviewees reported that all aspects of guidance counselling were as important as each other and were given equal attention. Conversely, vocational guidance counselling was ranked as the most important by teaching staff, followed by educational guidance counselling, with personal guidance counselling ranked as the least important.

Additionally, teaching staff were asked to indicate the activities of the guidance service with Junior and Senior Cycle students. Personal guidance counselling was listed as the main activity across both Junior and Senior Cycle with higher percentages seen in Senior than Junior Cycle. Similarly, the provision of information was reported as a main activity, again with higher percentages for Senior Cycle than Junior Cycle. On the other hand, assessments were reported as being more commonly carried out with Junior Cycle than Senior Cycle. Teaching staff also indicated that Senior Cycle students receive twice as much advice as Junior Cycle students. Similar disparities were reported in the level of work on career transition programmes with Senior Cycle students reportedly receiving three times as much work in this area than Junior Cycle students. Educational development programmes were reported by teaching staff to be low across both cycle groups, whilst similar levels of personal and social development programmes were reported across groups. However, it is important to highlight that of the 46 teaching and support staff in the school, only 18 teachers
responded to the staff survey. Furthermore, some respondents did not answer some questions so the views may not be representative of the whole sample.

(iii) Impact of the DES 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling provision in the case school

The consequences of the DES Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling provision for the case school is evident in this study. It is important to note that whilst the school has also experienced cutbacks in a number of different areas, including special duties teachers and Assistant Principal posts, this case study report focuses specifically on the 2012 allocation of guidance resources. Nonetheless, consideration needs to be given to the context within which this re-allocation has occurred. The Education Act (1998) states that schools must provide “appropriate guidance” to its students, although deliberations as to the meaning of the term ‘appropriate’ are endless. The findings indicate that the school is honouring the terms of the 1998 Education Act by providing guidance but it has become more challenging since 2012. Prior to Budget 2012, there was an allocation of between 23-24 hours of guidance counselling divided evenly between two guidance counsellors on a half-time basis in the school. The current guidance allocation within the school is 19 hours 40 minutes, as the guidance counsellor also teaches two subject classes. In this regard, there has been a diminution of the guidance allocation in the school since 2012.

What has emerged in the findings is that in order to honour the 1998 Education Act in terms of guidance counselling provision, the school must make some unsavoury decisions about other elements of the school curriculum. This was clearly articulated by the Principal who explained that although he has to attend to the terms of the Education Act, he is not given any allocation from which to do so. In order to preserve guidance counselling hours, the case school has experienced a number of losses in other areas which have subsequently impacted upon students in a number of ways, some of which have been highlighted by the JMB (2012) and the ASTI (2013).

One of the consequences of the re-allocation in the case school is, according to the Principal, a ‘straight loss of teaching time’. In order to allocate the necessary hours to guidance counselling 19 hours and 40 minutes are being taken from within the current teaching allocation and re-allocate it to guidance counselling which has a number of consequences for other aspects of teaching. There
has been a loss of two subjects from the curriculum and resulting in students paying privately to study them. A further impact of the re-allocation of hours is the increase in class sizes whereby some classes have been amalgamated to compensate for the reduction in teaching staff. This has meant, in some cases, the incorporation of honours and passes classes. Concerns were voiced by the Principal about the level of support consequently available to the students with the impact being felt across all student groups regardless of ability.

Furthermore, the impact of additional cuts in the post primary sector has a bearing on guidance provision such as cuts in special duties teachers which has resulted in the non-replacement of staff on retirement. Consequently, the school was in the position this year of not having a Year Head for one year group. Considering the high esteem in which the Year Head structure is held, both the Principal and Deputy Principal reported this to be a significant loss.

Finally, the guidance counsellor reported that his job has become ‘much busier’ and the increased workload is having a cumulative effect by putting additional pressure on the school system. These difficult working conditions are now being reported across the post-primary school sector (Hearne & Galvin, 2014; IGC, 2013, 2014). The Principal highlighted the need to provide appropriate support and personal counselling in the school as ‘constant and on-going’, as there is ‘always someone in difficulty’ with difficulties ranging from ‘not eating a breakfast to bullying’. As a consequence of the increased demands on the guidance counsellor, the Deputy Principal noted that such support has ‘come back down the line to the Year Heads’ whose workload has subsequently increased. Her fear is that Year Heads might become ‘angry about the whole thing’. Additionally, some staff reported in the survey that there has been a diminution in pastoral care activities amongst staff due to increased paperwork that requires their time and attention.
Section 7: Conclusion

The overall aim of this single case study was to critically examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the Irish post-primary sector through an explanatory case study methodology in one school site. One of the key objectives was the creation of a case study protocol during the carrying out of the case study to inform future practice in post-primary guidance counselling based on the experiences of this case study enterprise (see Appendix 1).

This single case study cannot generalise its findings to other post primary schools, which is a limitation of case study research, but the findings may be characteristic of the current situation in the sector with regard to a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Yin, 2009). The focus of the research is to provide an in-depth view of the provision of guidance counselling in one mixed gender school in the context of a shifting policy and practice landscape. Whilst a whole school approach is consistently promoted as a model of good practice (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012; NCGE, 2004), the delivery of this type of guidance service has always been challenging but has become more complex since the re-allocation of guidance resources by the DES in 2012. Some of the central issues involved in a whole school approach to guidance delivery emerged in this case study.

One of the general findings in the study is the relational nature of guidance counselling in the Irish post primary school system. Although the guidance service may be a part of a school’s pastoral care structures its visibility is in danger of becoming diluted if it does not hold its own distinctiveness within the school community. This may be more challenging when guidance counsellors have less hours for guidance and have been re-assigned to subject teaching in addition to their guidance role. Another finding is the central position of the professional guidance counsellor with a particular expertise and the difficulty of finding a qualified practitioner at short notice. The impact on students who need consistent guidance support to prepare them for transitions is understandable.
Another concern is the disproportion in the provision of guidance counselling in the Junior and Senior Cycle whereby less time is available for guidance counselling to students in the first three years of post-primary school. In spite of the numerous research findings to date, this continues to be an ongoing problem. At the moment the propositions in the new Junior Cycle Curriculum to include elements of guidance counselling in the Junior Cycle are still being teased out, but guidance will not be a curriculum subject and may continue to be marginalised. An additional disenfranchised group of students appear to be those on PLC programmes attached to post-primary schools where the post primary guidance allocation resides.

Finally, as emerged in the findings of this case study, the impact of the DES 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling has reduced the guidance allocation and stretched the resources of the case school. Since 2012 the evidence from national surveys by a number of different organisations points to the erosion of one-to-one guidance counselling, increased classroom guidance, the employment of unqualified guidance staff or para-professionals, compression of classes and loss of curriculum subjects, and an increase in the crisis management of students experiencing difficulties (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Whilst the long-term impact of this new form of guidance delivery needs further research, a recent study by McCoy et al. (2014) suggests a link between restricted access to guidance counselling in post-primary with post-school decisions and outcomes for students.
References


National Centre for Guidance in Education. (2004). Planning the school guidance programme. Dublin: NCGE.


Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Case Study Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The protocol for carrying out the case study in the post primary school involved a number of different elements between 1\textsuperscript{st} September 2014 and 31\textsuperscript{st} May 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Design: September – October 2014</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary literature review, design of conceptual framework and development of suitable data collection instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Ethical Approval: October 2014</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University ethics procedures required submission of ethics documentation for the project to the University’s EHS Ethics Committee. Approval given to project on 24\textsuperscript{th} October 2014, and first stage of fieldwork commenced immediately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access and Sampling: October 24\textsuperscript{th} – November 17\textsuperscript{th} 2014</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling for the case study was confined to a total population of 12 post primary schools in a particular geographical area. The research team wrote to all 12 schools on 24\textsuperscript{th} October inviting them to take part in the research study with a specific deadline date for response. Only one school responded by the deadline date indicating it did not wish to take part. As there were no responses by deadline date from the other 11 schools they were contacted by telephone on Monday 17\textsuperscript{th} November. This elicited the voluntariness of one school to take part in the project as the case school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fieldwork, Analysis and Production of Case Report: November 2014 – May 2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fieldwork involved data collection and analysis in three specific stages between November 2014 and February 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1: Entry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research team held a meeting with the case school Principal on 20\textsuperscript{th} November to discuss the research project and commence the access and sampling of different stakeholders for data collection. The Principal acted as gatekeeper to communicate the research project to the school community and arrange the different data collection stages between the research team and the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, teaching and support staff and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2: Data Collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary data in the form of school documentation was provided by the Principal and Guidance Counsellor, i.e. School Plan; School Guidance Plan; DES WSE-MLL report and DES Guidance (Subject) Inspection report. Primary data was collected through three individual interviews with the Principal and Deputy Principal on December 1\textsuperscript{st}, and the Guidance Counsellor on January 9\textsuperscript{th}; an online questionnaire was administered through SurveyMonkey to teaching and support staff via the Principal between late November and January; and two focus group interviews were held with students from both the Junior (3\textsuperscript{rd} year) and Senior (5\textsuperscript{th} year) Cycle on January 28\textsuperscript{th} (n9 per group).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3: Closing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The data analysis and interpretation of the case study findings was carried out between December and April utilising a number of methods. The quantitative data in the online questionnaire was analysed using the SurveyMonkey instrument. The qualitative data generated in the online survey, individual interviews and focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis techniques. Finally, both individual and group interpretation of the primary data by the members of the research team was carried out in the latter part of February. The case study report was produced in draft form and reviewed amongst the research team before disseminating it to the case school for respondent validation. A meeting took place with the school management and guidance counsellor in early June to discuss the feedback from them on the Draft Case Report findings. A final Case Report was completed in February 2016.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2

**DES (2005b) Guidance Allocation**

#### Schedule A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Allocation (hours per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900-999</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>800-899</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700-799</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-699</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-599</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-499</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-399</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-299</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;200</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Allocation of guidance for post-primary schools under Free Education/Block Grant Scheme

#### Schedule B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Allocation (hours per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools with 500 or more pupils</td>
<td>22 hours/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in the 350-499 enrolment category</td>
<td>11 hours/week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Allocation of guidance for all post-primary schools not under the Free Education Scheme/Block Grant Schemes.
Appendix 3

Guidance Activities Framework (NCGE, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidance Activities that help students make choices</th>
<th>Guidance Activities that help students to make transitions</th>
<th>Other Guidance Activities that support achievement of aims of school guidance programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Development Programmes</td>
<td>Careers education/career transition programmes</td>
<td>Consultation (with parents, staff and students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Social Development Programmes Counselling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Managing, organising and co-ordinating guidance activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral (both by the GC to external agencies and internally by staff to the GC).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>