



Circular: 0072/2026

To: The Managerial Authorities and Principals of Recognised Post-Primary Schools

Guidance in Post-Primary Schools

(updating circular 0001/2025)

1. Introduction

[Section 9\(c\)](#) of The Education Act (1998) states that a school shall use its available resources to “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. This circular provides information to managerial authorities and principals in relation to whole-school guidance (WSG) as the appropriate model of practice in contemporary post-primary schools.

This circular is written in the context of [the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance](#) and accompanying [Strategic Action Plan \(2024-2030\)](#). Within the framework, four pillars and eight objectives underpin a clear vision for lifelong guidance in Ireland. This circular provides a foundation for the application of the concepts outlined in the framework, to support and strengthen guidance planning and practice within the post-primary sector.

This circular is informed by the key messages emerging from the national consultation on post-primary guidance conducted in 2025. A summary report of the consultation is available at www.gov.ie/guidance.

2. Purpose of this circular

This circular integrates and centralises policy relating to guidance in post-primary schools.

The purpose of this circular is to provide post-primary schools with information to support well-informed implementation of WSG planning and practice in the context of evolutions in policy relating to lifelong guidance, Junior Cycle reform, redevelopment of Senior Cycle and publication of the [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#).

3. Whole-school guidance (WSG)

Guidance is, by definition, person-centred and holistic. It supports an individual's personal and social, educational and career development: guidance facilitates and



empowers individuals to make informed decisions and life choices. In post-primary schools, guidance plays a significant role in supporting students' well-being and contributes to building internal and external resilience.

WSG is the contemporary model for guidance in post-primary schools. WSG means that all school personnel (**including but not limited to the guidance counsellors**) have an important role and responsibility to support students with their personal, social, educational and career choices. WSG supports the implementation of a large and varied range of activities and learning experiences provided to students in a progressive, developmental sequence.

A WSG programme is a clear and defined list of activities and learning experiences that are provided by school personnel (including but not limited to the guidance counsellor) to all students. The WSG programme is provided in order to meet the identified guidance needs of the school community (parents/guardians/carers and students). The WSG programme provides a range of activities and learning experiences, through:

- one-to-one appointments,
- group work (with a range of small medium and large groups),
- classroom guidance,
- units of learning,
- co-curricular and
- extra-curricular activities.

As the guidance needs of each school community will vary, WSG programmes will vary from school to school.

Each school should have a WSG plan in place. A WSG plan outlines a school's approach to WSG, and includes a detailed WSG programme. Further information and support for schools with developing their WSG plans is detailed in [Information Note 0001/2024](#), which provides clear and practical examples.

WSG activities and learning experiences should be based on the needs of the school community. WSG is planned for and implemented by a nominated WSG team, within which, the guidance counsellor plays a specialised role. WSG is the responsibility of the entire school community as outlined. The Board of Management and school management team have a responsibility to ensure that the provision and practice of guidance in the school is of the highest possible standard.

4. Clarifying the distinct role and professional identity of the guidance counsellor

(a) Specialist qualification:

Post-primary guidance counsellors hold a [dual qualification](#). They hold Teaching Council Route 2 registration and an [appropriate qualification](#) in guidance counselling which typically reflects NFQ Level 9. The role of the guidance counsellor can vary from school to school. Activities generally undertaken by the guidance counsellor are outlined in the [Standards and Qualifications in Guidance Counselling Education and Training- SQGCET \(2026\)](#)

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Guidance counsellors have specialist knowledge and training to support the personal/social development, educational development and career development of students with regard to WSG provision.

As outlined in the [SQGCET](#) framework, the following seven competencies are integral to the guidance counselling role:

- Appropriately integrating guidance counsellor theory, practice and policy
- Visibility of the guidance counselling service, professional accountability and workload management
- Ethical, inclusive and professional guidance practice
- Psychometric testing for occupational guidance
- Communication, collaboration and stakeholder engagement
- Access and interpretation of labour market information
- Research-, policy- and evidence-informed practice across the lifespan

Whenever a guidance counsellor is working with an individual/group/class, they engage in guidance counselling: they are integrating the skills, knowledge and competencies that they developed as part of their guidance counsellor education and training to support an individual's educational / career / social and personal development.

Guidance counselling is engaged in all elements of a guidance counsellors work which may include discussing ALL pathways available to students within education and the world of work; discussing work experience or labour market information; or when supporting an individual in understanding their values/interests/life-goals, to name some examples. Guidance counselling may also be provided at moments of personal crisis and at unexpected life-transition points.

It is important that guidance counselling is clearly distinguished from psychotherapy, and from the separate professional roles of counsellor and psychotherapist. Guidance counsellors in schools **do not provide psychotherapy or long-term therapeutic treatment**; rather, they provide guidance counselling within the educational setting, work within appropriate professional boundaries, and identify, support, and refer where a student's needs require more intensive or specialist intervention.

Accordingly, school policy should refer to this work as **guidance counselling** in full (and not counselling / careers teaching etc), so that the role is accurately understood by all stakeholders as a specialised educational support that makes a vital contribution to students' personal/social, educational and career development, while operating within clearly defined professional boundaries and referral pathways.

(b) Range of learning experiences

A guidance counsellor will undertake work with students in the classroom, in groups and through one-to-one sessions, as appropriate. A guidance counsellor will support a student's development in all interlinked areas of guidance (educational, careers, personal and social). A balanced approach to time management on behalf of the

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guidance counsellor will ensure that all guidance counselling needs of students are met as effectively as possible.

One-third of a guidance counsellor's allocated time (or as close to that as is practical) will be spent teaching classroom guidance, unless there are exceptional circumstances in a local school. Two-thirds of a guidance counsellor's allocated time will be available for group work (with a range of small, medium and large groups), one-to-one sessions and other components involved in the role such as attending student-support-team meetings. This ratio of time reflects student need in all areas of guidance, and the continuum of support. It is an appropriate distribution of a guidance counsellor's time.

5. WSG and Guidance Counsellors

WSG is the appropriate model for the provision of guidance in contemporary post-primary schools as outlined above.

Each school operates within its own distinct culture, ethos, and locally developed policies and systems, all of which are designed to respond to the diverse and evolving needs of its school community. Accordingly, the whole-school guidance (WSG) approach, including the role and function of the guidance counsellor, will vary from one school context to another.

Notwithstanding this variability of approach to WSG between schools, an effective WSG framework requires the purposeful and strategic deployment of the guidance counsellor as a key specialist resource within the school. Through postgraduate professional preparation at NFQ Level 9, guidance counsellors acquire a breadth and depth of specialist knowledge, skills, and competencies that should be utilised in a reflective, informed, and context-sensitive manner.

Through WSG, all members of the school community contribute meaningfully to students' personal, social, educational, and career development. In line with the broad definition of guidance, the guidance counsellor brings a distinct and specialist professional expertise to this work. For this reason, the positioning of the guidance counsellor within the school's support structures is critical in maximising the range, quality, and impact of support available to students.

6. Student and parent guidance needs

As noted, a WSG plan prescribes the WSG activities and learning experiences for all students in a school in a given academic year. It is evaluated, reviewed and updated annually in line with the guidance needs of students. The BOM are informed of updates annually. In creating a WSG plan, the identified needs of students and parents/guardians/carers are incorporated. This is a data-informed approach to planning, which can be facilitated in many ways. For example, a group of students may be surveyed, or reflective focus groups with parents/guardians/carers/students could be organised.



A continuum of support ([guidance for all, for some and for a few](#)) based on students' needs is anticipated in advance of each academic year and reflected in the WSG plan. Groups of students, individual students and parents/guardians/carers may have unique circumstances and requirements requiring particular support. Focusing on the disclosed needs of students and parents/guardians/carers in personal/social/educational and career guidance can lead to innovation and efficiency within planning.

An inclusive approach, again based on a continuum of support (guidance for all, for some and for a few), allows for an effective and efficient deployment of resources to meet the diverse guidance needs of the school community. A focus on a universally designed WSG programme will maximise inclusion and provide targeted support for those in need, ensuring that appropriate guidance is accessible for students and parents/guardians/carers.

7. Whole School Guidance Allocation

a) Use of the WSG Allocation

The WSG allocation, as provided for in Appendix 3 of the Post-Primary Staffing Circulars currently 0026, 0027 and 0028/2026, is deployed in each local school in a structured manner to support the delivery of a comprehensive, developmental WSG programme.

The WSG programme must be clearly articulated within the school's WSG Plan and aligned with the definition of guidance as encompassing students' educational, career and personal/social development. Accordingly, the WSG allocation should be deployed in each local school, with the clear objective of supporting defined guidance activities only. An outline of how the allocation for whole school guidance is deployed is included in each school's WSG plan so that use of the WSG allocation is transparent and clear for all each year.

Schools should ensure that all activities supported through this allocation are demonstrably linked to guidance outcomes and are underpinned by appropriate planning, monitoring and review processes within the WSG Plan.

The allocation for guidance is also referred to in Appendix 3 of 0026, 0027 and 0028/2026 where it is noted that the WSG plan should demonstrate an appropriate balance between the time provided for individual student appointments, group work (for small, medium and large groups), the provision of guidance lessons/modules, and other guidance-related activities.

b) Limitations on the Use of the Allocation

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The WSG allocation shall not be used for general or unspecified duties that fall outside the defined scope of guidance provision.

The allocation may not be utilised for general administration, routine organisational tasks, or broad-spectrum student support roles that are not explicitly grounded in the school WSG Plan. Examples of activities that fall under the definition of WSG are provided in [Information Note 0001/2024](#).

The WSG allocation must not be deployed in a manner that results in double counting or substitution for provision already resourced through other curricular or programme allocations, including, but not limited to, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Wellbeing, Learning for Life, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme/Leaving Certificate Applied modules (e.g. LCW), or other subject-based supports.

Schools are required to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of the WSG allocation, which should be outlined in the WSG plan for each local school.

c) WSG Allocation and the Specialist Role of the Guidance Counsellor

Central to the effective deployment of the guidance allocation is the distinct and specialist role of the qualified guidance counsellor.

While whole-school guidance hours may be deployed by a broader staff cohort to support developmental guidance activities, a key consideration in the deployment of the allocation is the appropriate use of the guidance counsellor's professional skillset, particularly in areas requiring specialist competence.

The allocation should be balanced to ensure both the delivery of universal whole-school guidance supports and the preservation of the guidance counsellor's capacity to carry out their specialised role effectively. The WSG plan will be a helpful asset in this regard.

8. Career-management skills, employer engagement and pathways

As outlined in the [National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance \(2024-2030\)](#), a focus on career-management skills and lifelong career mobility will instill the language of skills development and a sense of agency and empowerment in students, as they engage with their post-primary education.

There are many opportunities within the formal, extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes whereby engagement with employers may be possible for post-primary students. Exposure to the world of work and reflections on learnings can maximise experiential learning and informed educational and career choices and can be initiated and developed as part of WSG.

Additionally, parity of esteem for the variety and broadening availability of pathways after post-primary education could be introduced early in a students' Junior Cycle experience. [Circular 0009/2023](#) provides schools with guidelines as to how personal,

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social, educational and career guidance can be incorporated into the programme of learning at Junior Cycle.

TY programmes are currently under review in line with senior cycle redevelopment. In line with this review, a school's WSG plan should integrate pertinent aspects of the [TY Programme Statement](#). This includes, but is not limited to, the '*career exploration*' dimension, which should be reviewed by WSG-teams and integrated into WSG plans and programmes.

9. Effective Whole-School Guidance (WSG)

Effective WSG

- encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance and;
- refers to a range of learning experiences provided through a WSG approach, that assists students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives.

Characteristics of an effective WSG programme

An effective WSG programme of activities or learning experiences which are delivered by all school personnel throughout the academic year, as appropriate. As noted, a WSG programme provides a range of learning experience through one-to-one guidance appointments, group work (with a range of small, medium and large groups), classroom guidance, units of learning, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

An effective model of WSG in post-primary schools includes:

- provision of opportunities for students to engage with all three aspects of guidance through a variety of guidance-related activities, provided in a developmental sequence;
- provision of opportunities for students to engage in a variety of guidance-related activities throughout every year of their post-primary education, in line with their developmental stage;
- provision of guidance activities through a WSG approach which is led by a WSG team (within which, the guidance counsellor plays a specialised and pivotal role);
- an appropriate allocation of time provided to guidance counsellors to engage with students through one-to-one sessions, groups, and classroom guidance;
- accessibility on behalf of the guidance counsellor, to engage with students through one-to-one sessions, groups and classroom guidance i.e. the guidance counsellor has access to students;



- accessibility on behalf of students who have access to classroom, group and one-to-one whole school guidance;
 - engagement by members of the whole-school community, as appropriate, at key points during the academic calendar to meet the guidance needs of students e.g. during Careers Week, mock interviews etc. and encouraging all teachers and subject departments to develop WSG learning opportunities in their subjects and;
 - balance, whereby students have access to support in all areas of guidance (educational, career, personal and social) through a variety of means provided by the guidance counsellor and other pertinent personnel (one-to-one meetings, in groups and through classroom teaching).
- A clear outline of work experience opportunities for all, some and a few students as appropriate to include all aspects of work experience (including preparation, engagement and reflection)

10. Guidance Counselling Supervision: Professional Support Programme For Guidance Counsellors in Post-Primary School, PLC and CFE settings

As noted in this circular and in Information Note [0008/2023](#), the utilisation of guidance counselling to support the personal/social development of students is a key part of the school-guidance programme. It may be offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental-learning process, at moments of personal crisis and at key transition points.

Guidance counsellors may work with students on a wide range of developmental issues as a core member of the student-support team. Guidance counsellors are trained to respond appropriately to situations along a broad continuum and refer students on to other support services and agencies as appropriate, particularly with regard to [child-protection policies](#).

In order to support guidance counsellors with this work, the Department of Education and Youth funds a series of six sessions of supervision support, for guidance counsellors each academic year. Participation is open to all appropriately qualified guidance counsellors who are employed in post-primary school settings and PLC/CFEs.

Attendance of guidance counsellors at their six allocated supervision sessions is imperative. Supervision, through this Department-funded programme, is considered as an essential professional support to guidance counsellors and schools. The benefits of engaging in supervision are multifaceted and numerous both for the guidance counsellor and for the whole school community.

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The six annual supervision sessions are scheduled well in advance of the afternoons they take place. Ideally, guidance counsellors would not be timetabled for classes on the afternoon of their supervision day, so as to prevent any challenge with attending supervision. However, it is vitally important that guidance counsellors be released from their schools on the designated afternoon to attend the six supervision sessions during each academic year, as a priority task. Attendance at these two-hour sessions is considered by the Department to be part of the guidance counsellors' allocated hours of work, on the six afternoons of the year where they are scheduled to attend supervision sessions.

A certificate of attendance, outlining the dates that the guidance counsellor was present at supervision, is provided to all attendees at the end of each academic year. The guidance counsellor provides a copy of the certificate of attendance to the principal (for the school record) and retains a copy for their own records. These certificates may be requested as part of an inspection.

11. Teacher Professional Learning

The guidance team in Oide supports schools in relation to whole school guidance planning and practice through professional learning experiences and bespoke school support. Bookings and applications can be made through <https://oide.ie>. The guidance team can be contacted through info@oide.ie

12. Storage and transfer of guidance-counselling notes

As data controllers, Boards of Management are responsible for ensuring that guidance-counselling records are managed in accordance with data protection legislation, having regard to the confidential and sensitive nature of such records.

Boards of Management should have appropriate arrangements in place for the storage, retention and transfer of guidance-counselling records, in line with Information Note *Information Note* [0003/2024](#) for Principals, Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Teams in relation to the storage and transfer of guidance-counselling notes.

Clear policies and procedures governing the secure storage, retention and transfer of guidance-counselling notes are outlined in a school's WSG plan. Appropriate governance of these records supports continuity of guidance provision for students, promotes transparency regarding the management of student information, and assists schools in meeting their obligations under GDPR and child protection requirements.

13. Language and consistent terminology

A key recommendation from the National Consultation on a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance ([DE, 2023](#)) is the promotion and correct use of key terms in language relating to guidance.



Guidance is holistic by definition. It involves integrating the personal and social development of the individual into any education and career development, and planning for informed and meaningful decisions. In schools, **whole-school guidance (WSG)** is provided by all personnel as outlined above. Interactions with year heads, subject teachers and all school personnel can support students with their personal/social, educational and career choices.

Guidance counselling: A specialised, developmental and ethically-grounded service provided by a qualified guidance counsellor only, which stays within the remit of their NFQ level 9 education and training as outlined within the [Standards and Qualifications for Guidance Counsellor Education and Training \(Goi, 2026\)](#)

Whenever a guidance counsellor is working with an individual/group/class, they engage in guidance counselling: they are integrating the skills, knowledge and competencies that they developed as part of their guidance counsellor education and training to support an individual with educational / career / social and personal development.

Guidance counselling involves an inclusive and empowering process that supports individuals and groups across the lifespan, in making informed educational, career, personal and social decisions. Guidance counselling is engaged in all elements of a guidance counsellors work which may include discussing pathways within education and the world of work; discussing work experience or labour market information; supporting an individual in understanding their values/ interests/ life-goals, to name some examples. Guidance counselling may also be provided at moments of personal crisis. Grounded in professional standards and ethical principles, guidance counselling integrates theoretical knowledge, relational competencies and evidence-based practices. Through a collaborative and empathetic professional relationship, guidance counsellors support individuals in identifying their needs, recognising their strengths and untapped potential, and making developmentally informed choices. Accordingly, school policy should refer to this work as **guidance counselling** in full (and **not** counselling / careers teaching etc.), so that the role is accurately understood by all stakeholders as a specialised educational support that makes a vital contribution to students' personal/social, educational and career development, while operating within clearly defined professional boundaries and referral pathways.

Guidance counselling in relation to personal/social support for students involves the utilisation of guidance-counselling skills to support a student with personal/social developmental issues.

Guidance counselling in relation to a students' personal/social development, takes place within a guidance context, as outlined. Guidance counsellor education and training does not confer a counselling or psychotherapy qualification. A clear understanding of the support a guidance counsellor can provide, and of the boundaries between guidance counselling and therapeutic counselling/psychotherapy is vital, for all stakeholders.

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Due to their training, guidance counsellors have a clear understanding of the boundaries of their roles and in particular, a strong capacity to hold the boundaries between guidance counselling and therapeutic counselling.

14. Circular on guidance

This circular will be reviewed regularly and updated in line with progress made under the strategic action plan for lifelong guidance.

New policy publications concerning guidance (A role document for Guidance Counsellors and Guidelines for the Implementation of Whole School Guidance) are expected to be published in advance of August 2027.

Please bring this circular to the attention of the whole school guidance team, guidance counsellors, all members of the school community and the board of management.

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit

September 2026