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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

**Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School
Belfast**

September 2014

FOLLOW-UP TO THE STANDARD INSPECTION OF ST MARY'S CHRISTIAN BROTHERS' GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BELFAST, BT11 8NR (142-0021)

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection¹ of St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School in November 2012 when the quality of education was evaluated as satisfactory.

The inspection identified the need to provide learning activities and programmes, and a greater degree of challenge in the teaching, in order to meet more effectively the needs of all the pupils and to raise the overall inadequate GCSE standards.

ETI carried out an interim follow-up visit in November 2013 and a follow-up inspection in September 2014. The school action plan is of a good quality and the development plan is in line with the Department of Education's requirements. The school has received support from a range of external services, including the Belfast Education and Library Board. The principal and the chair of the board of governors reported that they were very satisfied with the level of support.

Since the original inspection, the fraction of pupils entitled to free school meals has risen from one-quarter to one-third of the enrolment. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs has almost doubled to 13%; 32 pupils have statements of educational need. There has also been a substantial renegotiation of roles and responsibilities and changes to staffing. This has included the appointment of a new literacy co-ordinator and a new head of history, to support the achievement of key strategic objectives, including widening the year-head's role to promote more robust tracking of pupils' progress.

Important improvements have been effected by senior leaders through more regular, meaningful and practical continuing professional development to support teaching and to improve the learning experiences for, and outcomes of, the pupils.

- The quality of the provision for history, which was satisfactory, is now very good, with significant improvement in the quality of the planning and the learning experiences of, and outcomes for, the pupils.
- The quality of provision for English, which was satisfactory, is now good. Improvements include the standards attained and the motivation and enjoyment of the pupils for learning. A continued focus on disseminating the best practice, and using data more effectively to raise standards, will support the department's improvement agenda.
- Across the school, more regular, robust and collegial monitoring and evaluation by teachers and middle managers, with a key focus on raising standards, has resulted in an overall improvement in the quality of provision and in standards.
- Overall planning, teaching and assessment, to promote steady progression in the pupils' learning, have improved, with four-fifths of lessons observed evaluated as good or better. The more consistent use of active learning has led to greater levels of pupil engagement and motivation.
- The enhancement of the key stage 4 curriculum is now tailored better to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils, leading to improved standards, better progression and improved examination entry policy.

¹ See standard inspection report at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-post-primary/inspection-reports-post-primary-2013/standard-inspection-st-marys-christian-brothers-grammar-school-belfast.pdf>

- Pupils at risk of underachievement are being identified earlier and a wider range of intervention strategies is helping support them in their learning. They talked favourably about the introduction of well-planned events to develop their study skills, from year 8 onwards; these events have led to more parental engagement in supporting learning.

Furthermore, there has been steady and significant improvement in the standards attained by the pupils in examinations at both GCSE and GCE level.

- The percentage of pupils achieving seven or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has increased from 73% in 2012, to 79% in 2013, with a further increase to 88% in 2014 which is now in line with similar schools in the same free school meals category².
- The percentage of pupils achieving seven or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has increased from 60% in 2012, to 65% in 2013, with a further significant increase to 82% in 2014 which is now in line with similar schools.
- The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has increased from 48% in 2012, to 59% in 2013, with a further significant increase to 93% in 2014.
- Four-fifths of all subjects offered at GCSE level improved their attainment at grades A* to B.
- The percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE Advanced A level at grades A* to C has increased from 69% in 2012, to 70% in 2013, and to 72% in 2014.

The quality of provision for mathematics remains satisfactory; although there is improvement in the climate for learning and raised expectations of what the pupils can achieve, there remains a need to improve further the questioning and the development of mathematical reasoning in lessons.

While there is still room for improvement in the overall standards the pupils achieve, the school's internal data shows the pupils are making good progress. Overall, the standards attained by the pupils at GCSE and GCE levels are now good.

Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is now good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational provision.

The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address which is to sustain, and build on, the improvements in both the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and their outcomes.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's progress in addressing the area for improvement.

² Similar refers to males in selective schools with 10%+ free school meals entitlement.

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