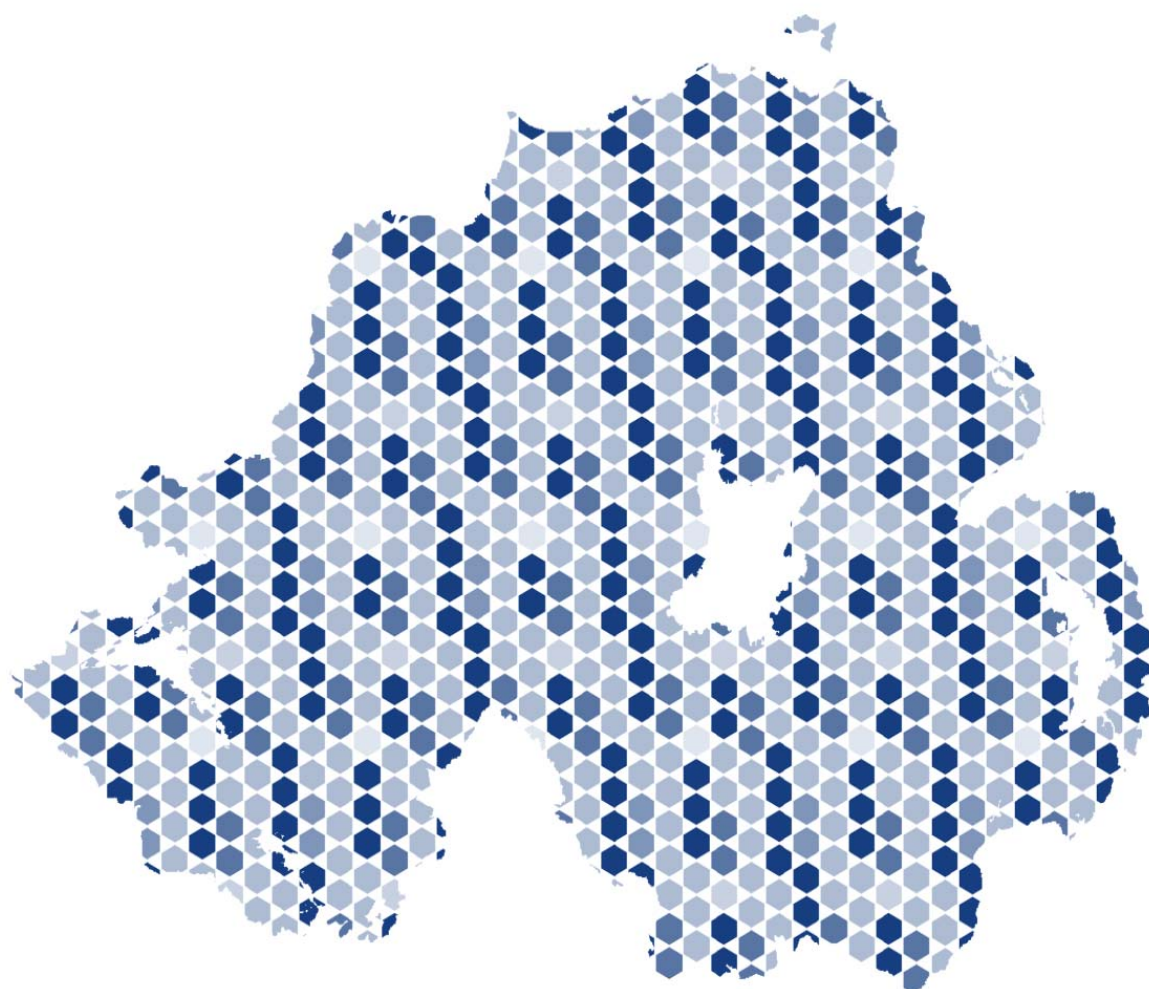


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Dominican College, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in October 2010

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Dominican College, Fortwilliam is a voluntary grammar school for girls situated on Fortwilliam Park in North Belfast. The school draws most of its pupils from the greater North Belfast area. The current enrolment is 1,015 pupils with just over 25% of the pupils in the sixth form; the enrolment has remained steady over the last three years. Approximately 8% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school has identified just over 5% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- provision across a wide range of subjects with a particular focus on English, mathematics and science, including the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum;
- the progress being made towards an extended curriculum;
- the views of the pupils, parents, teachers, support staff and the Board of Governors (governors);
- the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection;
- the approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity;
- the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life;
- the provision for careers, education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG); and
- leadership and management at all levels across the school.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good.

2.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the very inclusive ethos which permeates all aspects of school life;
- the very good quality of the care, support and guidance for the pupils which results in good progress in their learning;
- the highly motivated pupils who engage enthusiastically in their learning;

- the good standards achieved by the pupils at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level;
- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, four-fifths of which was good or better; and
- the very good leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the two Vice-principals and the senior leadership team (SLT).

2.2 The main area for improvement is:

- the need to ensure a more consistent process of self-evaluation across the school to inform more effectively the school's improvement agenda.

A summary of the main findings for the specialist subject areas under focus can be found in Appendix 1.

3. THE VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF AND GOVERNORS OF THE SCHOOL

3.1 The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the governors and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

3.2 Two hundred and six questionnaires were issued to parents; 39% were returned to Inspection Services Branch and 37 contained additional written comments.

3.3 Most of the responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the work and life of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the value placed on each pupil as an individual, the range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits available, the effectiveness of the induction process and the encouragement and support given to the pupils to reach their full potential.

3.4 Forty-eight of the 71 teachers and 12 of the 13 support staff completed confidential questionnaires with 13 teachers and three support staff providing additional written comments. Nearly all of the teaching staff expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the staff highlighted how privileged they feel to work in a school where the staff are valued and treated with respect. In addition, they commented on the approachability of the Principal and the excellent working relationships at all levels. Almost all of the support staff indicated that they like working in the school.

3.5 The governors expressed their strong support for the ethos, aims and work of the school. In particular, they commented on how well the Principal has led the staff in embracing curricular change. They also appreciate the quality of written documentation provided by the Principal which gives them good opportunities to examine, review and celebrate the achievements of the pupils.

3.6 In the discussions held with the pupils, they talked positively about the care and support from the teachers and were able to identify a range of individuals to support them both academically and pastorally. There is clear evidence to show that they know what to do and who to talk to if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

In the course of the inspection, the pupils, including those who require additional support with their learning, showed high levels of motivation and engaged enthusiastically in their learning. When given the opportunity, they responded articulately to effective questioning and worked well with their peers in well-planned small group or paired activities.

The pupils have good opportunities to engage in a range of extra-curricular sporting, social, and cultural activities which add significantly to their learning experiences.

The levels of attainment in public examinations are good.

At General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) the pupils' achievement in grades A*-C in at least seven subjects including English and mathematics is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar selective schools. Over the corresponding period, over half of the pupils achieved grades A*-B in at least seven GCSE subjects, with two-fifths of the subjects either within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average.

The SLT has begun to address the variation in attainment across the departments through the dissemination of more effective learning and teaching strategies.

The percentage of pupils achieving grade A-C in three or more A Levels has remained steady over the past three years and above the average for similar schools; half of the subjects are either five or ten percentage points above the respective NI average at GCE grades A*-C.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 3.

4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The teaching, learning and assessment in the provision observed is good.

4.2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate, with four-fifths of lessons being evaluated as good or better.

In the more effective practice, the ethos was purposeful and there were very effective working relationships between the teachers and the pupils and among the pupils themselves. The teachers provided well-focused learning objectives and the work built effectively on previous learning; the pupils had well-planned opportunities to develop their skills through active and enjoyable learning experiences and in most of the lessons, ICT was used effectively to enhance the pupils' learning.

In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons observed, the work was not matched to the pupils' ability, the questioning was closed and there were few opportunities for the pupils to interact with one another.

4.2.2 CURRICULUM PROVISION

The Principal and SLT have introduced courses for the pupils in years 13 and 14, in co-operation with other schools, which are relevant to their interests, aptitudes and abilities. There is a need for the school to develop further collaborative arrangements with other

education providers, including the further education sector, to meet the career aspirations of all of the learners. The school is contributing to the work of the North Belfast Area Learning Community and now needs to establish arrangements for the evaluation of their progress towards the implementation of the Entitlement Framework, and outline these within the school development plan (SDP).

4.2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The provision for pastoral care within the school is very good.

The pastoral work of the school is led effectively by the newly appointed Vice-principal and the pastoral team. The commitment to the welfare of the pupils is evident in the caring, supportive and inclusive ethos which permeates all aspects of the work of the school. In order to enhance the provision, the school needs to develop further a whole-school focus on promoting positive behaviour, including opportunities to extend the range of ways in which the pupils make input to, and provide feedback on, the life of the school.

The quality of provision for those pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good.

The special educational needs co-ordinator provides very good leadership; he is reflective and committed to the ongoing development of the provision for SEN. The school identifies early those pupils who require additional support with their learning and the well-targeted interventions impact positively on the pupils' learning experiences and the good standards they achieve.

4.2.4 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

4.2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the provision of healthy school meals and the wide range of after-school sporting opportunities available to the pupils. There is a need to ensure that healthy eating programmes and activities have a whole-school focus to further promote healthy eating messages.

4.2.6 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The quality of provision CEIAG is very good.

The head of careers provides very good leadership and, having carried out an audit, has a clear vision for the development of CEIAG. The planning for the taught careers provision is detailed and the wide range of experiences provided ensures good progression in knowledge, skills and personal qualities. As a result, by the end of year 14, the majority of pupils have a very good understanding of the world of work and of the education and employment opportunities that are available to them. The head of careers has recognised the need to put a stronger emphasis on CEIAG at Key Stage 3 in order to prepare the pupils better for choices at the end of year 10. The accommodation and resources for CEIAG are of outstanding quality.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management in the school is good.

5.1 The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is very good. Since taking up her appointment three years ago, the Principal has worked effectively with the school community to develop a more effective leadership and management structure, which has an appropriate focus on learning and teaching and on meeting the needs of all of the pupils. In this important work she adopts an inclusive approach to managing change and has overseen important improvements in the standards the pupils achieve. She is supported effectively by the recently appointed Vice-principals who are developing their respective leadership and management roles.

5.2 The school's commitment to continued improvement is evident in the well-conceived strategy to develop further the leadership role of the heads of department and the well-planned opportunities for the teachers to join working groups that focus on important elements of curriculum development. Building upon this good work, the Principal and SLT need to ensure a more consistent approach to self-evaluation, including the further development of learning and teaching strategies and the more effective application of data analysis to promote improvement in the standards the pupils attain.

5.3 The SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

5.4 There is very good communication between the Principal and the governors; the governors are hard-working and highly committed to the whole-school community. They are well informed about school developments and the achievements and standards attained by the pupils.

5.5 The school deploys its financial resources appropriately and continues to monitor the suitability and sustainability of aspects of the curriculum it provides for the pupils.

6. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the area for improvement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The quality of provision in English is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between the pupils and staff which foster and promote learning and development;
- the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm of all of the staff in the department;
- the good quality of the teaching and learning resources and the very good quality of the learning environment;
- the good quality of the teaching in almost all of the lessons observed;
- the good standards achieved by almost all of the pupils in the lessons observed; and
- the good quality of the support provided in the literacy and library lessons for years 8 and 9.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop further the self-evaluation process, including the more effective use of data, to improve outcomes, achievements and standards; and
- share existing good practice across the department.

Mathematics

The quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the pupils and the teachers;
- the good levels of individual support provided for the pupils in the lessons observed;
- the thoroughness of the teachers' preparation for the lessons;
- the commitment and hard work of the teachers in supporting the pupils through, for example, extra classes; and
- the well-developed strategies to involve the pupils in self-evaluating their learning.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- improve the quality of the teaching through, for example, more effective questioning strategies and by engaging the pupils more actively in their learning;
- develop further self-evaluation to promote improvement; and
- raise standards, particularly at GCSE, through, for example, ensuring appropriate progression and that the work is more closely matched to the pupils' mathematical ability.

Science

The quality of the provision in science is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between the pupils and the teachers;
- the quality of the teaching, which in over three-quarters of the lessons observed, was good or very good;
- the good start made in the evaluation of the quality of the science provision;
- the commitment of all the teachers to the review and improvement of classroom practice; and
- the effective collegial leadership of the department.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- link self-evaluation more closely to action to promote improvement in order to raise the standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations and to improve further the quality of the pupils' learning experiences.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Dominican College
 ii. School Reference Number: 142-0082
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 11/10/10
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 8 Intake	150	150	151	153	150
Total enrolment	1010	1043	1031	1031	1015

1.3 Attendance

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2009/10	NI Average 2008/09
% Attendance	94.4	93.2	91.6	92.6	93.8	93.3	92.5	93	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 66.18 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.739
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 15.337

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Girls	150	153	152	151	153	135	121	1015
Enrolment: Total	150	153	152	151	153	135	121	1015
PTR	16.692	17.077	16.914	14.159	15.402	13.702	13.755	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2008/09) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	88.0	NI Av Year 13	92.6
Year 14	81.9	NI Av Year 14	86.4

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2008/09	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	22		135	
Another School	45%	24.1	1%	1.3
Employment	0%	3	2%	3.4
Full-time Further Education	55%	58.9	8%	9.5
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	87%	82.8
Full-time Training	0%	6.4	0%	0.4
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.7	1%	1
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	5.9	0%	1.6

APPENDIX 3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Dominican College, Belfast SCHOOL YEAR: 2010/2011

GCSE	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	94	97	94
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	90	95	87
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	88	91	88
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics	86	90	85
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	81	80	82
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	100	100	100

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table 1 showing the GCSE subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2010, in comparison with respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

	More than 10 percentage points above	Between 5 and 10 percentage points above	Within 5 percentage points	Between 5 and 10 percentage points below	More than 10 percentage points below
GCSE A*-B	Art & Design Design and Technology: Textiles* German*	Drama	Chemistry Geography Information Technology Music Physics Religious Studies	Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject English History Irish	Additional Mathematics Biology Business Studies English Literature French Home Economics Food Mathematics Spanish Sport (PE) Studies
GCSE A*-C	German*		Art & Design Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject Drama English English Literature Geography History Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music Physics Religious Studies Spanish	Additional Mathematics Design & Technology: Textiles Sport (PE) Studies	Biology Business Studies French Home Economics Food

GCE A*-C	Biology Design and Technology** Music Sociology	Business Studies Drama French** History History of Art and Design** Media Film and TV Studies Religious Studies	Art & Design Chemistry English Literature Geography Home Economics** Irish Mathematics Politics Spanish		Physics Sport (PE) Studies**
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*Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 over 3 years

**Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 20 over 3 years

NOTE: GCE A* grade applies from 2010.

Table 2 showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A* - B		Art & Design Drama English Fine Art Information Technology Music Sport (PE) Studies	Additional Mathematics English Literature Geography History Home Economics Food Irish Mathematics Physics Religious Studies	Biology Business Studies Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject French Spanish	Design and Technology: Textiles German
GCSE A* - C	Art & Design Technology and Design: Textiles Drama English English Literature History Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Biology Business Studies Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject French Geography Home Economics Food Physics Religious Studies Spanish Sport (PE) Studies	German		

GCE A*-C		Art & Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography History History of Art and Design Home Economics Irish Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Information Technology Physics Sociology Sport (PE) Studies		
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NOTE: GCE A* grade applies from 2010.

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