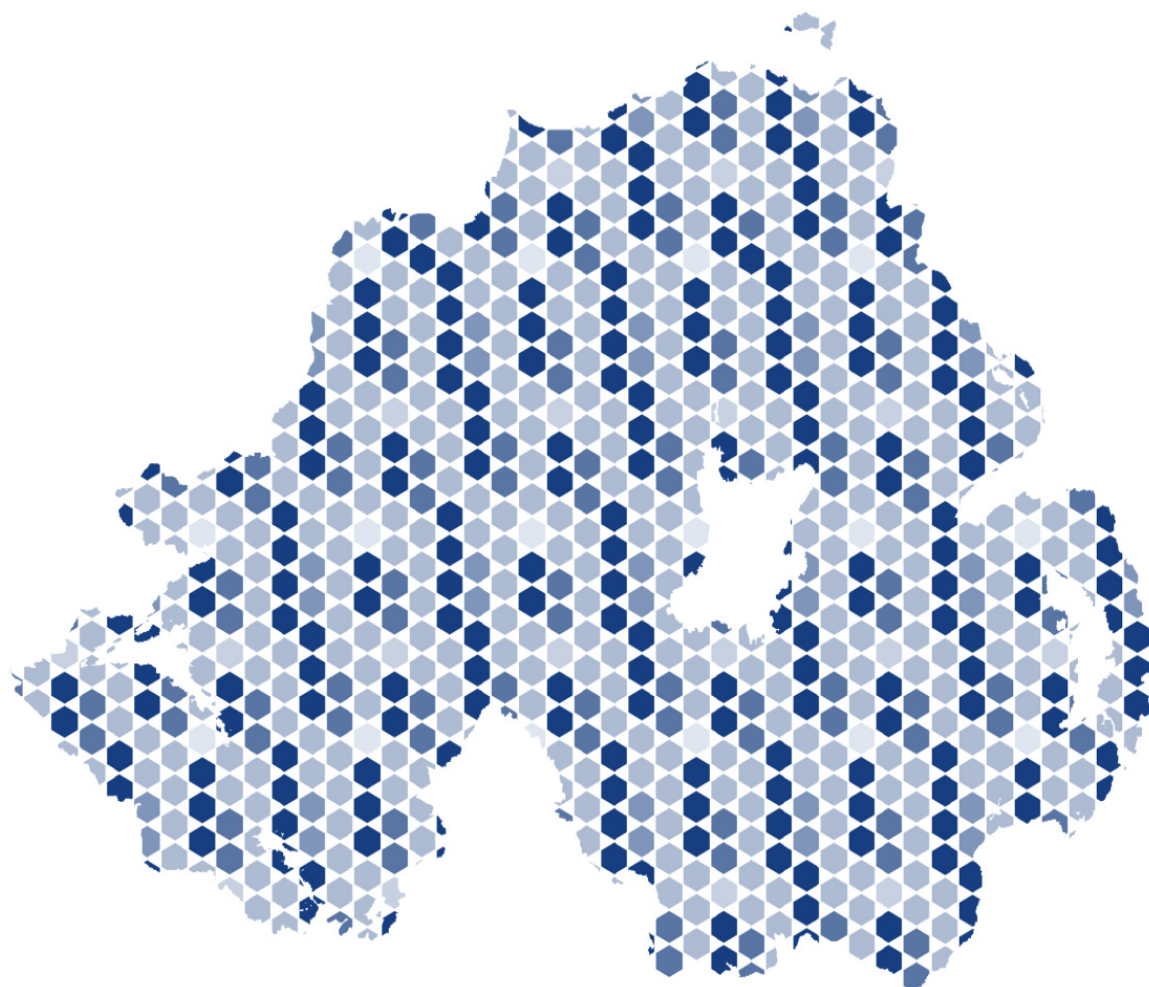


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Brigid's High School,
Armagh

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

St Brigid's High School is a non-selective 11-16 school for boys situated on the outskirts of Armagh. Although enrolment has increased slightly over the last two years, there has been a decline since 2005 from 278 to 218 pupils. The school draws its pupils from a number of primary schools in the city and surrounding rural areas. The school has identified 21% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning. Approximately 35% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are currently 20 newcomer pupils from four different countries in the European Union.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- the provision across a wide range of subjects with a particular focus in English 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 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; 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 satisfactory.

2.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the exemplary behaviour of the pupils, their self-confidence and the positive attitudes to their learning;
- the quality of teaching which was good or better in most of the lessons observed;
- the strong pastoral support provided by the highly committed staff;
- the use of a wide range of links with external agencies to enrich the learning experiences of the pupils;

- the recent improvement in the proportion of the pupils gaining grades A* to C in at least five subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE); and
- the effective use by both pupils and teachers of ICT in the majority of the lessons observed.

2.2 The main areas for improvement are the need:

- to raise further the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C in at least five GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics;
- to review urgently the school development planning process and underpin it with rigorous and systematic self-evaluation; and
- to review the curriculum provision through more effective collaborative arrangements in the area learning community in order to meet the needs of the pupils.

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 Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, and 12.

3.2 One hundred and eight questionnaires were issued to parents; 28% were returned to Inspection Services Branch and 17 contained additional written comments. Most of the responses to the questionnaires and the written comments from parents were highly affirmative of the work of the teachers in the school. The parents highlighted the very good pastoral care arrangements, that their children are well-settled in the school and that the school recognises and values the contribution of each pupil to school life. A minority of the written responses, however, raised concerns about a lack of challenge in their children's work, and that school work and homework are not given a sufficient priority by teachers in the school.

3.3 Thirteen teachers and nine support staff in the school completed confidential questionnaires, with three teachers and one member of the support staff providing additional written comments. Most of the responses from the teachers and support staff were supportive of the work of the Acting-principal and of the senior management team (SMT).

3.4 The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school; they praised, in particular, the increased self-confidence of the pupils who attend the school and the commitment of the teachers and the support staff to the welfare and attainment of the pupils. They highlighted the need for clarity about the proposed future of the school in order to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all of the pupils.

3.5 In discussions held with the pupils they recognise and value the support they receive from their teachers. They report that they feel safe in school, and that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being. A number of the year 12 pupils, however, expressed concerns about not being able to access a sufficiently broad range of GCSE subjects to suit their interests and aspirations.

3.6 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Acting-principal, and representatives of the governors, the areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

4 KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Overall, the standards achieved by the pupils are satisfactory.

When the teaching is good or better, the pupils are highly-motivated and engaged in their learning; they provide extended responses which reflect good levels of understanding. The pupils, including those with additional needs, are supported effectively to become confident learners who achieve well within most lessons. The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary.

Over the last three years the numbers of pupils achieving five or more subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to C has varied significantly; in two of the last three years the results were below the average for similar non-selective schools in Northern Ireland (NI). There has been, however, a significant improvement in the results during 2010, with 69% of the pupils achieving grades A* to C in five or more subjects at GCSE. Over the same three year period, the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more subjects at GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics is also below the NI average for similar schools. The standards achieved at A* to C in just under half of the GCSE subjects over the past three years are more than five percentage points below the corresponding NI average figures. It is important that appropriate action is taken to address this shortfall with coherent whole school approaches to raising performance.

The pupils who have special educational needs make good progress in a number of GCSE examinations. However, the school needs to review and develop the range of accreditation opportunities for pupils with special educational needs in order to improve the range of post-16 options and career pathways when they leave school.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 4.

4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

Overall, the quality of the provision for learning is good.

4.2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from very good to inadequate. Three-quarters of the lessons were good or better and just under a fifth were very good; very few were inadequate.

In the best practice: there are excellent working relationships between teachers and pupils; effective teacher questioning results in well-considered and extended oral responses from the pupils; the skilful use of success criteria negotiated by the pupils at the start of the lesson guides their work and gives them more responsibility for their learning; learning intentions

are clear, are revisited during the lesson and are consolidated effectively at the end; and the teachers make effective use of ICT applications to stimulate the pupils in their learning, including the use of video clips and online assessment tools.

In the less effective practice: there is over-direction of lessons by the teachers with insufficient involvement by the pupils in their learning; the use of closed questioning approaches fails to develop the responses of the pupils; the infrequent use of homework limits the opportunities for the pupils to develop and apply their learning; there is inadequate marking for improvement and insufficient written feedback to help the pupils address weaknesses in their work; and there is an excessive use of worksheets, or textbooks, by the teachers which are not well-suited to the interests of the pupils.

The quality of provision for those pupils with special educational needs is good. Most of the lessons are well matched to the learning needs of the pupils, leading to good improvement in their levels of achievement. There is also a good system for monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs against subject specific targets which are set by all of the teachers. The targets are reviewed and progress discussed with pupils on a regular basis. The special educational need co-ordinator (SENCO) has recognised the need to ensure that there are common targets and support strategies and a more consistent approach across all of the subjects. There are helpful Individual Educational Plans for all of the pupils who require additional support with their learning. Effective collegial work between the teachers and the classroom assistants in lesson planning and in teaching and learning approaches is a key strength. The classroom assistants are well-trained and effectively support and guide the pupils in their work.

4.2.2 CURRICULUM PROVISION

Pupils at both key stage (KS) 3 and KS4 do not have a suitably broad and balanced curriculum to meet their needs. At KS3, for example, the pupils are not provided with timetabled lessons in music, and the school does not have a teacher who can teach home economics. Although the school, through its links with the Southern Regional College (SRC), has extended its provision of applied courses at KS4, the range of subjects available to pupils is narrow. The lack of options on the timetable, does not offer sufficient post-16 progression pathways to address the career aspirations of the pupils.

The school has appointed a co-ordinator for the development of the Entitlement Framework who has worked hard to audit the current provision and set appropriate targets for development. The school development plan (SDP), however, does not address the urgent need to improve the quality, breadth and balance of the school's provision. There is a need for more and better collaborative working with the local post-primary schools and the SRC to widen the curriculum offer for the pupils.

Pupils have good opportunities to develop a broad range of ICT skills in their lessons, and they use confidently a range of ICT applications in their work.

4.2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. The teachers are highly committed to meeting the pastoral needs of the pupils. The strengths of the pastoral care provision include: effective arrangements which involve the pupils in decision-making in the school, for example, through the School Council, which is facilitated well by the teachers and where the senior pupils demonstrate good leadership skills, offering excellent role models for the younger pupils; the caring and supportive ethos; the range of extra-curricular

activities; the good links with external agencies; and the well-managed mentoring programme at KS4. Although, the pupils have a generally good understanding of the sanctions and rewards, it is less effective at KS4 where there is a need for a better reward system. There has been a steady reduction in the number of pupils who have been suspended from the school; this sanction is now used rarely in the school.

The school's capacity to provide appropriate support for those pupils at risk of marginalisation is satisfactory. The mentoring system identifies and supports well those pupils who may fall behind in their work or disengage completely from education. The school, however, needs to strengthen the monitoring, through more regular visits by teachers, of the educational and pastoral provision for the small number of pupils who are currently educated off-site with alternative education providers.

The school provides effective support for newcomer pupils with a very good induction programme and withdrawal support and a school 'buddy' system which welcomes and includes the newcomers.

4.2.4 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) but the following area needs to be addressed:

- the need for more regular communication to parents about pastoral policies and how to raise concerns about the safety of their children; and
- the need to update safeguarding and child protection training for all staff

4.2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the nutritional quality of the school meals and the health and fitness programmes linking diet and exercise, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.2.6 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The provision for CEIAG is satisfactory. Most of the pupils have a sound understanding of progression routes and career pathways to match their career aspirations and interests. Effective use is made of work experience for year 12 pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world of work. Through the taught careers programme, complemented effectively by pupil interviews with advisers from the Department for Employment and Learning careers service, most of the pupils have good opportunities to develop their career planning skills. Those pupils in the year 12 cohort who attend the SRC to undertake applied courses, are not, however, provided with timetabled careers lessons, the absence of which fails to meet their needs. The school has recently introduced an Asdan level 1 Certificate of Employability at KS4 to enhance the pupils' wider employability skills of communication, team working and problem solving. The teachers need to avoid unnecessary overlap between elements of this programme and the content of the GCSE Learning for Life and Work course.

The range of learning materials used in the taught careers lessons does not reflect the range of post-16 pathways available to the pupils when they leave school. Action is needed to refresh and extend the range of information available by including online and text resources on post-16 careers pathways.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of leadership and management in raising achievement and in supporting the pupils is satisfactory.

5.2 The Acting-principal, who has been in post for over two years, provides very good pastoral support for the pupils; he has done much to foster good relationships generally within the school. Given the low level of pupil enrolment, and the weak financial position of the school a key challenge for the SMT and the governors is to provide a coherent curriculum to meet more appropriately and effectively the needs of the pupils. No decision has been made on whether or not to implement a proposed 'soft' federation structure with St Patrick's Grammar School, under which a joint sub-committee of governors from both schools would share elements of governance, yet allowing each school to retain its own governing body and remain a legal entity regarding school budgets and pupil admissions. The delay has added to considerable uncertainty in the school and is impacting negatively on the school's ability to develop a coherent SDP. Currently, school development planning is ineffective and is in urgent need of improvement, in order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Members of the SMT and teachers in the school are not sufficiently involved in identifying whole-school priorities and in implementing strategies to bring about improvement. More work is needed, for example, to develop coherent approaches to literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Although there are good examples of departmental development planning, the school needs to ensure a greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of the development planning at all levels. The use of self-evaluation and data that is available in the school to identify whole school priorities is inadequate, particularly in responding to the low proportion of pupils achieving five or more subjects at GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics.

5.3 The SENCO provides good leadership and guidance to teachers working with a range of pupils with special educational needs. She leads effectively a team of highly motivated and committed classroom assistants who play a significant role in supporting the pupils.

5.4 The governors show high levels of commitment to the life and work of the school. Their role in school development planning is underdeveloped.

5.5 It will be important that DE, the employing authority, governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision.

6.2 The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

6.3 The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The quality of the provision in English is satisfactory.

The strengths of the work observed include:

- the good working relationships and mutual respect between the pupils and their teachers;
- the good quality of the teaching in half of the lessons observed;
- the hard working and committed teachers;
- the good start made to reviewing the KS3 provision through revising and updating the units of work; and
- the good efforts made to enhance the learning environment through the use of ICT and through the displays of the pupils' work.

The areas for improvement are the need:

- to improve the outcomes at GCSE level in English;
- to have a more coherent strategy for the development of literacy across the school; and
- to improve the consistency in the quality of the teaching by: extending pupils' oral and written responses; improving the quality of formative assessment and ensuring that teaching strategies are further developed to meet the needs of all pupils.

Science

The quality of the provision for science is good.

The strengths of the work observed include:

- the effective leadership of the head of department and her commitment to the continued improvement of the science provision;
- the hard work and commitment of the teachers in supporting the pupils;
- the good or better quality of teaching in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the improving standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE level;

- the willingness of the pupils to respond enthusiastically and apply their scientific knowledge when given the opportunities; and
- the good progress in reviewing the KS3 scheme of work.

The area for improvement is:

- the need to develop the strategies for self-evaluation in order to improve further the quality of learning and teaching and the standards achieved by the pupils.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Saint Brigid's High School v. Date of Inspection: W/C 11/10/10
 ii. School Reference Number: 523-0160 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-16
 iv. Status: Catholic Maintained Non-Selective

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

| School Year | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Year 8 Intake | 40 | 38 | 41 | 39 | 41 | 46 |
| Total enrolment | 278 | 231 | 233 | 207 | 216 | 218 |

1.3 Attendance

| Year 2009/10 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | Average 2009/10 | NI Average 2009/10 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|----|----|-----------------|--------------------|
| % Attendance | 93.2 | 87.8 | 89.6 | 87.6 | 91.8 | - | - | 90 | 91 |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|---|-------|
| 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: | 18.5 | iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): | 0.807 |
| ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 11.80 | | |

| Year 2010/11 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | TOTAL |
|------------------|----|------|-------|-----|------|----|----|-------|
| Enrolment: Boys | 46 | 41 | 42 | 40 | 49 | - | - | 218 |
| Enrolment: Girls | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| Enrolment: Total | 46 | 41 | 42 | 40 | 49 | - | - | 218 |
| PTR | 11 | 13.5 | 13.83 | 9.5 | 12.5 | - | - | 11.8 |

1.5 Staying On Rate (2009/10) (N/A)

| | | | |
|---------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Year 13 | N/A | NI Av Year 13 | N/A |
| Year 14 | N/A | NI Av Year 14 | N/A |

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

| 2008/09 | Year 12 | NI% | Year 13/14 | NI% |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|------------|-----|
| Total Number of Leavers | 35 | | N/A | N/A |
| Another School | 28.6% | 12.8 | N/A | N/A |
| Employment | 51.43% | 5.7 | N/A | N/A |
| Full-time Further Education | 3% | 46.6 | N/A | N/A |
| Full-time Higher Education | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Full-time Training | 14.3% | 27.5 | N/A | N/A |
| Seeking Employment/Unemployed | 0 | 3.8 | N/A | N/A |
| Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant | 8.6% | 3.5 | N/A | N/A |

APPENDIX 3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Saint Brigid's High School 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 | 44 | 36 | 69 |
| Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics | 16.4 | 11 | 13.3 |
| Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects | 79.45 | 67 | 96 |

EXAMINATION RESULTS

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

Table 1

| | More than 10 percentage points above | Between 5 and 10 percentage points above | Within 5 percentage points | Between five and ten percentage points below | More than 10 percentage points below |
|--------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| GCSE A*-C | Design and Technology Learning for Life and Work Motor Vehicle Studies | Art and Design Polish | Additional Science French Information Technology Science A | English Geography Irish Religious Studies | History Mathematics Sport(PE) Studies Statistics |

HEALTH AND SAFETY

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