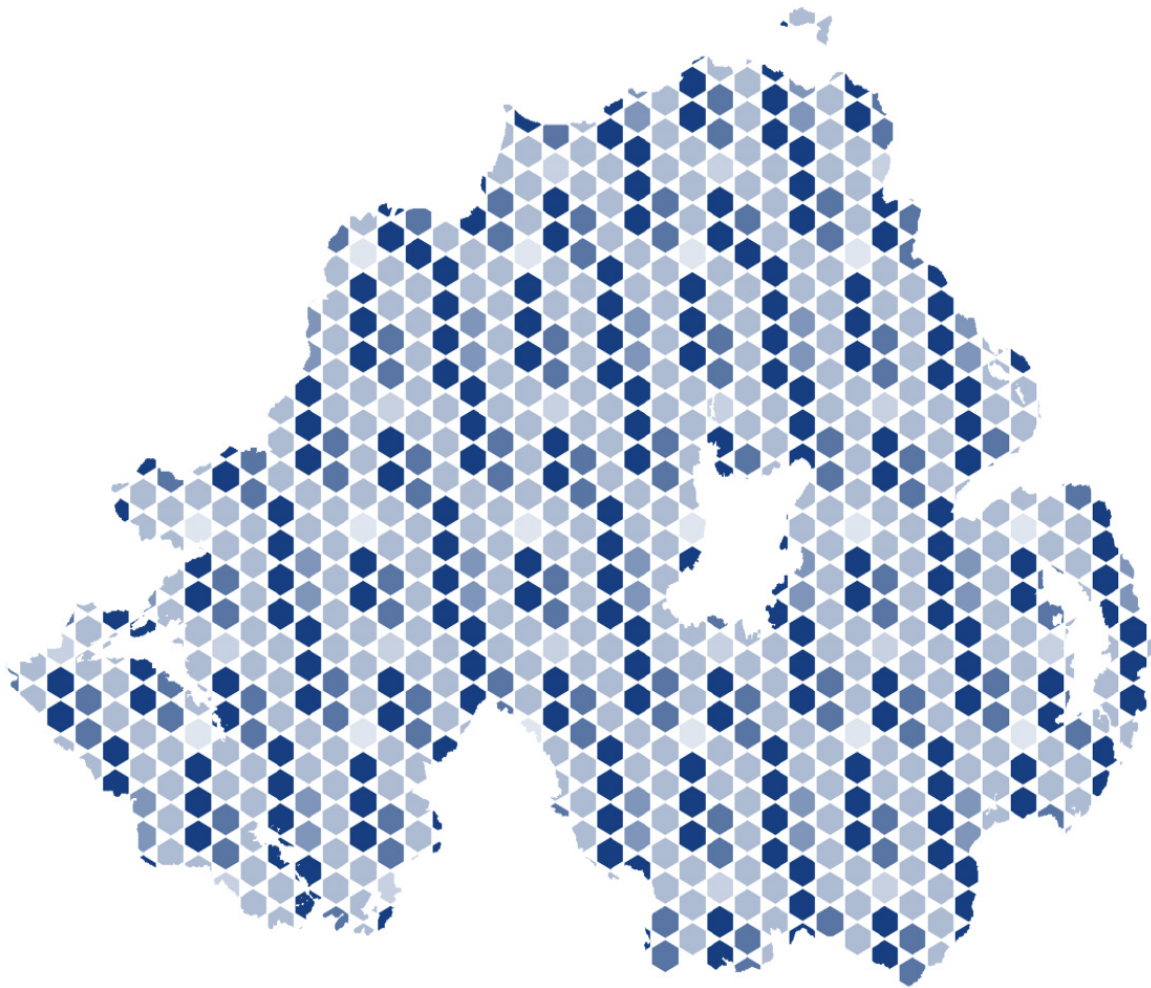


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's High School,
Lurgan

Report of an Inspection
in May 2011

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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 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's High School, Lurgan is a comprehensive school for girls at 11-14 and a non-selective school for girls at 14-16 within the Craigavon system of junior and senior high schools. The enrolment has decreased from 576 in 2008/9 and stands currently at 534. Approximately 20% of the pupils in key stage (KS) 3 are entitled to free school meals; in KS4 this entitlement rises to 31% when each year over one-half of the pupils transfer to the local grammar school at the end of year 10. The school has identified 11% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning, and there are 38 newcomer pupils. The school is part of the review of the post-primary provision within Lurgan being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education. During the inspection one-fifth of the classes were being taught by substitute teachers, whose work formed part of the inspection.

1.2 FOCUS OF THE INSPECTION ¹

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- curriculum provision across a wide range of subjects, with a particular focus on English, science, history and the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum; and
- leadership and management at all levels across the school.

The inspection also focused on the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection; the quality of planning for, and management of, individual needs; progress towards the Entitlement Framework, and the provision for careers education (CEIAG). The views of the pupils, parents, teachers, support staff and governors were also taken into account.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

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

2.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the caring, supportive and pupil-centred ethos reflected in the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the self-confident, friendly pupils who are well motivated and engaged in their learning;

¹ The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in post-primary schools are available in the Inspectorate's publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self evaluation* at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.htm>

- the standards attained by most of the pupils, especially by the end of KS3;
- the quality of the teaching, which was good or better in over four-fifths of the lessons observed; and, in one-half, was very good or outstanding;
- the effective integration of the academic and the pastoral provision to raise the standards attained by the pupils; and
- the outstanding leadership of the Principal and the highly effective leadership of the Senior Management Team (SMT) in bringing about improvement.

2.2 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 by inspectors with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10 and 12.²

3.2 The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that they are highly appreciative of the work of the school, in particular, of the very good care and support given by the dedicated staff and the Principal to the welfare of the pupils and to the development of their personal and social skills.

3.3 All of the teachers and the support staff who responded like working in the school; they commented on the effective leadership of the Principal and the excellent working relationships. The inspection findings concur with these responses. The teaching staff indicated that they benefit from relevant staff development and have appropriate resources for learning and teaching. Almost all of the staff reported that they feel valued by the Principal and management. A significant minority of the staff think that the pupils could be given more opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process of the school.

3.4 The governors expressed their strong appreciation for the excellent work of the Principal, the very dedicated and professional staff, the range of enrichment opportunities for the pupils and the high regard for the school in the community. They reported that they are fully informed about the life and work of the school in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

3.5 In discussions, the pupils talked openly and positively about their experiences in the school. They value the friendly atmosphere and the support they receive from their teachers to ensure that they achieve their best. They also indicated that they feel safe in the school and are fully aware of what to do if they have any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being.

3.6 The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal, and to the representatives of the governors, the views of the parents, teachers and support staff and the very few areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

² The number of questionnaires issued and returned, and the number containing comments are shown in Appendix 2.

4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The effective integration of the academic and pastoral provision ensures that addressing the needs of the pupils is central to the school's work. The pupils are well supported in their academic, social and emotional development; most of them make very good progress throughout their time at the school. In the lessons observed, the pupils were enthusiastic and engaged in their learning; most gave confident responses and demonstrated the skills to work collaboratively in groups or paired activities. They responded well to the opportunities to engage in extended discussions about issues relevant to them. There is evidence that they transfer these skills across a range of contexts both in and out of the classroom. The pupils' achievements are celebrated throughout the school in the very good displays in the classrooms and corridors, in assemblies, through competitions and in the local press.

The pupils attain high standards in the end of KS3 assessments. Furthermore, the pupils achieve success in a wide range of sporting, cultural and community contexts.

Over the last three years, most of the pupils in year 12 were entered for five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level; just over one-half achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. This is in line with the average for similar non-selective schools in Northern Ireland (NI); in 2010, the pupils' achievement in grades A*-C in at least five subjects was above the NI average. Over the same period, the pupils' achievement in grades A*-C in at least five subjects including English and mathematics has fluctuated; overall it is below the average for similar non-selective schools. The SMT has recognised the need to address the variation in attainment and the inspection findings endorse this as a key priority.

Most of the pupils with additional needs achieve well and in some cases they reach a high level of attainment. Those pupils with English as an Additional Language are well integrated into the school. The school has been tracking the progress of individual pupils with additional needs to celebrate their success and to inform the staff about how they might build on and improve their support for these pupils.

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

4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

4.2.1 STANDARDS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The overall quality of the learning and teaching in the provision observed is very good.

The quality of the teaching in over four-fifths of the lessons observed was good or better; in one-half it was very good or outstanding. The teachers work very hard, prepare thoroughly for lessons and have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve.

In the best practice, the lessons are well-structured, well-paced and build on the pupils' previous learning. The teachers share the learning intentions and the associated success criteria at the beginning of lessons, and, along with the pupils, summarise the increase in knowledge and understanding in useful plenary sessions. Most of the teachers use effective questioning to elicit extended responses and to develop the pupils' oral skills. The teachers

plan and use a variety of learning and teaching strategies to engage the pupils actively in their learning and to develop the pupils' personal capabilities, including their ability to think creatively and critically. In the cases of the English, history and science departments, the teachers plan work set in relevant, interesting and contemporary contexts, matched well to the interests of the pupils.

There is effective use of ICT across the majority of subjects to enrich and enhance learning and teaching, including the use of digital music technology, animation, digital photography, moviemaking and the recent development of a virtual learning environment.

There is a range of appropriate support for pupils with additional needs, including specific classes and withdrawal support. There is, however, a variation in the quality and the use of the individual education plans. Currently they do not provide enough guidance for either the teachers or the pupils to work towards improvement. The subject-specific targets for the pupils should be more focused and measurable.

4.2.2 CURRICULUM PROVISION

There is a broad and balanced curriculum at KS3, including good opportunities for the pupils to make connections through creative links in their learning between subject departments. The Principal and SMT demonstrate a strong commitment to the rationale which underpins the aims of the Entitlement Framework; the review and development of the curriculum is a key aim within the school development plan (SDP). The school regards its collaboration with other education providers as a strategic priority and contributes well to the Craigavon Area Learning Community (CALC). Currently, however, collaboration within the CALC is limited and the proportionate increase in recent years in the number of pupils who transfer to grammar school at the end of KS3 reduces significantly the subject choices for the pupils in KS4. As a result, the school's progress towards the implementation of the Entitlement Framework by 2013 is satisfactory.

The school provides enriched experiences for broader learning which benefit the personal and social development of the pupils. For example, the links with a school in Sri Lanka involve activities which heighten the intercultural awareness of the whole school and the community. A number of the subject departments have developed curricular links with their feeder primary schools to enable the teaching staff to build more effectively on the pupils' prior learning in areas such as mathematics. During the inspection, a group of children from a local primary school worked with year 9 pupils as part of their curriculum project in design and technology.

4.2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The welcoming and friendly pupils display very good behaviour both in and out of class. There is a strong sense of community throughout the school, underpinned by a distinctive caring, supportive and inclusive ethos. All members of the school community, pupils and adults, are valued, reflecting well the school's motto 'Together Towards Success'. A particular strength of the provision is the quality of the teaching and learning within the pupils' personal development classes.

4.2.4 SAFEGUARDING

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

4.2.5 CEIAG

The quality of the provision for CEIAG is good. The effective head of CEIAG has developed detailed policies and schemes of work with clear guidance on teaching strategies, resources and assessments, and monitors and evaluates the quality of the provision well in order to bring about improvement.

The pupils have good opportunities to discuss their aspirations, to engage in personal career planning and to use information from a range of well-organised sources in order to make appropriate careers decisions. They value the guidance they receive from the teachers and the Department for Employment and Learning careers advisor in preparation for choosing subjects at key transition points. In addition, they benefit from a range of work-related learning opportunities, which give them an understanding of the world of work and help to develop their employability skills.

A significant minority of the subject departments have identified appropriate opportunities for the further development of employability and careers, including increasing the emphasis on raising the pupils' awareness about Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics related pathways. In supporting the further development of CEIAG, this best practice needs to be applied across all the subjects.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The Principal, who has been in post for 13 years, provides outstanding leadership and management of the school. She has promoted and embedded distributed leadership at all levels. Her inspirational vision to guide the staff in linking intrinsically the pastoral and academic needs of the pupils has ensured continuous improvement in the standards and achievements. The Vice-principal and the senior teachers provide very good support to the work of the middle managers and to recently-appointed staff. The staff are committed to sustained improvement and approach development work within the school with energy and enthusiasm.

5.2 The co-ordination of special needs is well managed by the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator; there has been a good range of staff development focused on meeting the individual needs of the pupils. The staff are well informed about the range of complex challenges facing the pupils.

5.3 There is effective use of pupil performance data and management information for identifying strengths in provision and targeting under-achievement. Audits and evaluations of the work of the subject departments have established baseline positions to inform the improvement process across the school.

5.4 The SDP complies fully with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order and, together with the associated action plans, it sets out a number of suitable priorities and areas for development. The departmental development plans address the whole-school priorities and a well-structured internal and external staff development programme has a positive impact on the quality of learning and teaching, and on the standards attained by the pupils. Consequently, a number of the teachers have shared their good practice with staff in other schools.

5.5 Through the excellent communication and mutual respect between the Principal and the governors, the governors provide well-informed good quality support for the work of the school and play an important role in continuous improvement.

5.6 The school deploys its financial resources appropriately and makes effective use of available resources to support learning and teaching. In a few instances, however, the substitute teachers employed are not subject-specialists.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

6.2 It will be important that the employing authority, governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision at KS4, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The quality of provision in the English department is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils in the lessons observed;
- the high standard of teaching and the very good engagement in learning shown by all of the pupils;
- the good progress being made in English by all of the pupils;
- the standards achieved by the majority of the pupils in GCSE English at grades A*-E;
- the diversification of provision in drama and media studies by the teachers of English; and
- the positive disposition of the teachers towards self-evaluation and continuing improvement.

The main area for improvement is:

- to personalise learning and teaching by developing target-setting further.

Science

The quality of provision in science is very good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between the pupils and the teachers in the lessons observed;
- the pupils' motivation and ability to work independently and collaboratively;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in all of the lessons observed; in one-half of the lessons it was very good or outstanding;
- the steady improvement, over the past three years, in the standards attained by the pupils in the public examinations at GCSE level, particularly in Single Award science;

- the commitment of all of the teachers to the review of classroom practice and the use of a wide range of teaching strategies and resources to engage the pupils actively in their learning; and
- the outstanding leadership of the head of department and the very good use of performance data to track the pupils' progression in their learning.

APPENDIX 2

	Number of questionnaires issued	Number of questionnaires returned	Percentage returned	Number of written comments
Parents	113	56	50%	29
Teachers	36	31	86%	12
Support staff	20	16	80%	2

APPENDIX 3

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Mary's High
 ii. School Reference Number: 523-0070
 iii. Age Range: 11-16
 iv. Status: Catholic Maintained
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 16/05/11
 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	129	129	157	147	124
Total enrolment	618	577	576	562	534

1.3 Attendance

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2009/10	NI Average 2008/09
% Attendance	95.6	94.3	90.7	87.8	87.5	0	0	91	91

1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:	36	iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact):	0.732
ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):	14.833	Number of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused only)	11

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Girls	124	151	157	54	48	0	0	534
Enrolment: Total	124	151	157	54	48	0	0	534
PTR	15.637	17.677	17.098	14.702	13.069	0	0	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2009/10) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	0.0	NI Av Year 13	N/A
Year 14	0.0	NI Av Year 14	N/A

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2008/09	Year 12	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	74	
Another School	18%	12.8
Employment	5%	5.7
Full-time Further Education	65%	46.6
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A
Full-time Training	1%	27.5
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	1%	3.8
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	9%	3.5

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Mary's High School, Lurgan

SCHOOL YEAR: 2010/2011

GCSE	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE and Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	97	80.5	82
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	52.7	43.06	61.64
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	31.08	12.5	19.18
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	90.54	77.78	93.15

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*-C	Home Economics Media Film and TV Studies Sport (PE) Studies*	Office Technology*	Additional Science* Art and design Design and Technology English Music* Single Award Science	Geography	Biology Business Studies Drama* French* History Information Technology Irish Learning for Life and Work Mathematics Polish* Religious Studies
GCSE A*-E		Design and Technology French* Home Economics Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology* Single Award Science	Additional Science* Art and design Biology Business Studies Drama* English Geography Irish Learning for Life and Work Music* Polish* Religious Studies Sport(PE) Studies*	History Information Technology	

*Denotes subject which had a total entry of less than 30 over 3 years

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*-C			Art and design Drama Information Technology Irish Science Double Award	Additional Science Biology Design and Technology Home Economics Learning for Life and Work Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Sport (PE) Studies	Business Studies English French Geography History Mathematics Single Award Science
GCSE A*-E	Art and design Biology Double Award Science Drama Irish Music Polish Sport (PE) Studies	Additional Science Business Studies Design and Technology English French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Learning for Life and Work Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Science Single Award			

ACCOMMODATION

- The quality of the accommodation in the changing rooms is unsuitable.
- The canteen facilities are not sufficient for the number of pupils.
- The school requires more disabled access from the staff car park.
- Throughout the school rising damp, cracked and broken plaster and rainwater leaks present ongoing maintenance problems.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is an urgent need for a system to control access at the front door, to update the Closed Circuit Television system, increase the security lighting and upgrade security on all external doors.
- The old fire hose reels along the corridors are a health and safety risk.

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