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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 an Unannounced Inspection Visit**

**Dominican College  
Portstewart**

**June 2015**

The Department of Education requested that the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carry out an unannounced inspection in Dominican College, Portstewart in June 2015.

The main focus of the unannounced inspection was to evaluate the nature and adequacy of the arrangements for safeguarding and pastoral care. This included the support provided to pupils, especially those who have expressed concerns or, on whose behalf concerns have been expressed, regarding any pastoral matter, including those related to allegations of bullying.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a review of the range of pastoral care and safeguarding policies, including the anti-bullying policy and associated procedures;
- a detailed scrutiny of relevant documentation, including the minutes from a range of meetings at various levels in the school, notes of internal investigations and interviews, letters to and from various stakeholders and the school's curriculum plans;
- interviews with senior leaders, including the chair of the Board of Governors, a number of key staff with roles and responsibilities related to pastoral care, special educational needs, child protection and learning support;
- extensive discussions about pastoral care and safeguarding with groups of randomly selected pupils from years 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14;
- the completion by the school of an audit of its safeguarding arrangements; and
- a detailed scrutiny of two recent safeguarding case studies selected by the school, related to bullying allegations, in order to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the school's safeguarding processes and procedures in such cases.

### **Summary of Main Findings**

- The school has an appropriate range of policies related to pastoral care and safeguarding, including child protection, anti-bullying and codes of conduct for pupils and staff.
- A relevant personal development curriculum is in place which addresses a wide range of pastoral care and safeguarding issues, including those of relationships and mutual respect between young people, and which is reviewed regularly and adapted proactively by the school in light of the changing challenges which young people face.
- The staff provide appropriate levels of personal support to help individual pupils address any challenges and barriers to learning which they may face.
- In the interests of developing and supporting the pupils, appropriate contacts have been established with a range of external agencies, which are drawn upon when required to help the pupils develop personal resiliencies and to enhance the personal development curriculum.

- As the pupils progress through the school, there is clear evidence among most of them of a growing maturity and the development of independence, including coping strategies and self-management skills; they expressed the view that they feel safe and happy in the school.
- The school's anti-bullying policy is already subject to continuing review in light of recent guidance from the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Anti-bullying Forum. This review needs to be taken as an opportunity to benefit pupils and staff through:
  - i. a closer alignment of the policy with the existing school discipline policy and the code of conduct for staff and pupils, particularly the use of more consistent language;
  - ii. developing further a clear and coherent positive behaviour management policy which sets out an appropriate reward system and promotes a consistent application by staff; and
  - iii. a structured follow-up process after interventions by staff to address behaviour-related issues, in order to monitor progress and initiate any further actions where appropriate.
- There are appropriate procedures in place for the detailed investigation of instances and allegations of inappropriate behaviour, including bullying. The evidence shows that these procedures are followed in a thorough and detailed manner by the school when dealing with individual cases. Further improvement could be achieved by:
  - i. reviewing the procedures by which the governors respond to allegations or concerns, including the manner in which they communicate the outcomes;
  - ii. maintaining a chronological record in the case files in order to provide a clear overview of actions taken by the school; and
  - iii. improving further the risk-assessment model by which pupils are referred for counselling and guidance.
- While a majority of the pupils are aware of the independent and confidential counselling service which is available to them in the school, they were unsure of how to access the service. A significant minority of the pupils are not aware of the service. Further awareness-raising across the school population of this important service is necessary.
- There is a need for the school to provide the pupils with more formal and regular opportunities to reflect on and discuss with staff their experiences of, and views on, pastoral care. This should include the positive management of behaviour and safeguarding, taking full account of the Department of Education Circular on Pupil Participation<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education Circular 2014/14 Pupil Participation, June 2014

## **Overall Conclusion**

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the unannounced inspection:

- the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people, which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education;
- the school has adequate procedures in place to investigate and manage expressions of concern regarding any pastoral matter, including those related to allegations of bullying; and
- the school provides intensive support to individual pupils who have pastoral care and/or safeguarding needs, including those who are or have been subjected to bullying behaviours.

A small number of improvements have been recommended in this report to enhance the effectiveness of the provision and arrangements for pastoral care in the interests of all the pupils. The school has demonstrated the capacity to address the areas for improvement identified.

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