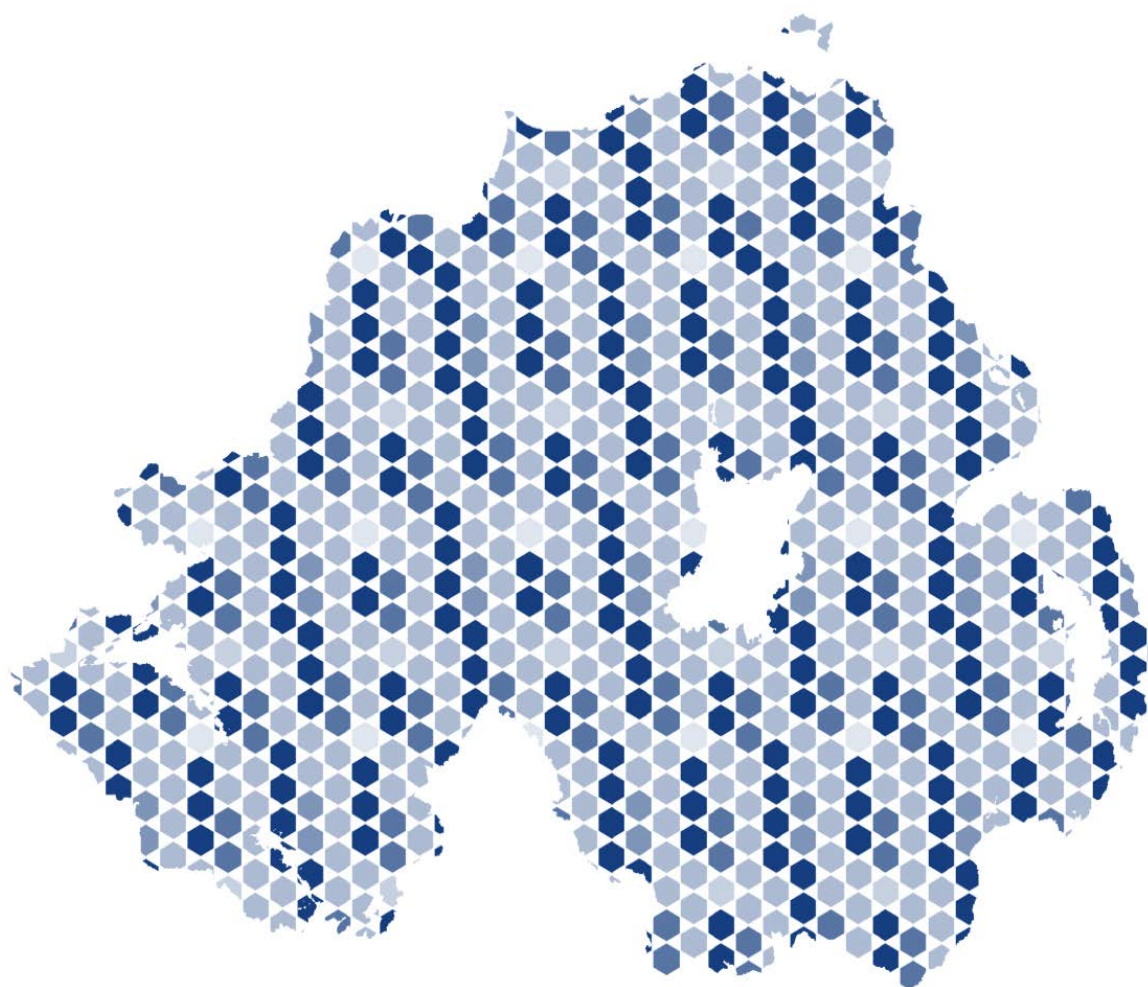


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Mercy College, Ballysillan,  
Belfast

Maintained, non-selective, co-educational 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection (Involving  
Action Short of Strike) in  
February 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
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CUSTOMER  
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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Context

Mercy College, under the trusteeship of the Mercy Sisters, is situated off the Ballysillan Road in North Belfast. The pupils attending the school come from across North Belfast. Over the last four years, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals has remained consistently high at approximately three quarters of the enrolment; one half of pupils are currently identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

Within the past two years there has been significant re-structuring of the senior leadership team (SLT), with the appointment of a permanent vice-principal and two assistant principals. The school has recently changed its status from all-girls to co-educational; consequently, in September 2017, boys were admitted to the school in year 8. The school has a well-established Shared Education partnership with a neighbouring post-primary school.

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that only the senior leadership team would be co-operating with the inspectors. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

<b>Mercy College</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
Year 8 Intake	76	71	67	76
Enrolment	433	446	452	448
% Attendance (NI Average)	92 (92 )	93.5 (93.5)	91.8 (92)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	78	75	71%	72
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	48 (209)	44 (197)	46 (210)	50 (223)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need in the mainstream school	9	10	16	21
No. of newcomers	8	*	9	*

\* Fewer than five pupils

### 2. Views of parents and staff

A very small number of parents (7) and staff (5) responded to the online questionnaires; almost all of the responses were positive about the life and work of the school. The written comments were discussed with the principal and a representative of the governors.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

### 3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of a post-primary inspection is to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the pupils;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

In addition to the focus on English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, there was a supplementary subject focus on science in this inspection.

As a result of the industrial action by the teachers, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the quality of the provision and the overall outcomes for the pupils;
- the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards;
- the quality of the provision in English, mathematics and science; and
- the quality of the provision for the care, welfare and support of the pupils.

Where it has been possible to evaluate aspects of the foci, they have been reported below.

### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Unable to assure the quality of education
Outcomes for learners	No performance level available
Quality of Provision	No performance level available
Leadership and management	No performance level available

### KEY FINDINGS

#### 5. Outcomes for learners

- In discussions with inspectors, the pupils were polite, confident and engaged well.
- Overall the pupils' attainment in public examinations requires further improvement at all levels; however, leadership recognise this to be a priority and have implemented a range of strategies. Importantly, headline performance improved in 2017, particularly at Key Stage (KS) 4.

- Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, has fluctuated above and below the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. In two of the three years the percentage has been in line with or above the NI average.
- Over the past three years the outcomes attained by the pupils in around one-third of the individual subjects, at GCSE level at grades A\* to C, are more than five percentage points below their corresponding NI averages.
- In two of the past three years, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics is in line with the NI average for non-selective schools. In the other year, this proportion was well below the corresponding average.
- At GCE A level, or equivalent, there is significant variation in the percentage of pupils attaining at grades A\* to C in at least three subjects in the past three years; this has fluctuated from well above to well below the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. Last year this proportion was in line with the corresponding NI average.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the standards attained by the pupils in English, mathematics and science;
- the progression in the pupils' learning; and
- the pupils' wider skills and dispositions.

## **6. Quality of provision**

- Careful consideration of the changing dynamics in the enrolment and the wide variation of the pupils' needs, interests and abilities remain central to the ongoing development of the curriculum at KS 3. At KS 4, the curriculum is suitably flexible; the pupils access a blend of general and vocational courses that are aligned broadly to their career progression opportunities. The school is extending the range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects on offer. At post-16 the school collaborates with other schools in the North Belfast Area Learning Community to expand the pupil's subject options, particularly for vocational courses.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke positively of: the supportive ethos in the school; the good relationships they have with staff and with each other; the opportunities to take on leadership roles; and, the range of enrichment activities they engage in.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the impact of the curriculum;
- the effectiveness of the guidance and support in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences;

- the effectiveness and impact of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in promoting successful learning;
- the quality or overall impact of the careers education, information, advice and guidance provision;
- the quality of provision in English and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, and science across the school; and
- the impact of care and welfare on teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The recently implemented school development plan has been informed by an extensive pupil, parent and staff audit that has identified appropriately and prioritised important areas for improvement, such as raising the standards of attainment at GCSE level, including English and mathematics.
- The SLT has implemented and standardised a system of assessment at KS 3 to inform better the process of target setting and subsequent monitoring of each pupil's progress against their individual targets. However, the associated action plans require more effective use of the baseline measurements of the pupils' ability to set appropriately challenging targets. Clear and regular monitoring of progress based on first-hand evidence will enable the teachers and leadership at all levels to track more precisely and evaluate the impact of actions for improvement.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors have supported the school leadership in planning for and managing the transition to co-educational status. They are well informed about all aspects of the school and are focused on exercising their support and challenge functions to secure improved outcomes for the pupils. Importantly, the governors keep under review the school financial plans to address the current and future needs of the school.

## **8. Safeguarding**

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils report that they feel safe and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. There is a need to review aspects of the school's policies for safeguarding and child protection to reflect further the developments in the pastoral provision.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **9. Overall effectiveness**

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

## Examination performance and other statistical data

### GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2014-15 to 2016-17

Based on data held by the school in SIMS<sup>2</sup> and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Mercy College achieving five or more GCSEs (A\* to C and A\* to E) and equivalent subjects, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band<sup>3</sup>.

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	57.8	41.9	86.5
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category<sup>4</sup></i>	<i>72.9</i>	<i>72.2</i>	<i>72.2</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	31.6	23.3	40.3
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>32.9</i>	<i>38.1</i>	<i>38.1</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	82.5	81.4	92.3
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	30.8	21.9	31.3

### GCE A level and equivalent examination results at grades A\* to C from 2014-15 to 2016-17

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Mercy College achieving three or more GCE A levels, or equivalent, at grades A\* to C, compared with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band.

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	46.5	17.1	35.2
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>41.0</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	72.1	60.0	79.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>96.2</i>	<i>96.1</i>	<i>N/A</i>

<sup>2</sup> SIMS: School Information Management System

<sup>3</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

<sup>4</sup> The benchmarking bands for 2015/16, as set in in Circular 2017/8 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting' are different to those used in preceding years; therefore, trend comparisons with previous years' benchmarking data need to be treated with caution.

**Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level or equivalent (over the past three years) Grades A\* to C**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Number of pupils in Year 12 cohort	57	43	52

<b>GCSE Subject</b>	<b>Number of Entries over three years</b>	<b>School A* to C %</b>	<b>NI A* to C %</b>
Art & Design	49	65.3	82
Child Development	80	97.5	91
Drama	12	66.7	80
Early Learning	30	26.7	N/A
English Language	142	57	75
English Literature	15	60	89
History	28	78.6	71
Irish	8	100	97
Learning for Life and Work	134	85.1	83
Mathematics	146	36.9	51
Music	7	100	85
Performing Arts	14	21.4	65
Religious Studies	102	73.5	73
Science (Additional)	16	68.8	75
Science (Core)	18	50	50
Science Single Award	66	83.3	72
Spanish	20	75	85
Polish	*	100%	N/A

\* indicates fewer than 5 entries over 3 years



## OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS (EQUIVALENTS): KEY STAGE 4

Level 2	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Total entry over 3 years	School A* - C %
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C		
Applied Sciences (BTEC)	76.5	N/A	N/A	25	100
Beauty Services (OS)	100	N/A	97.1	79	97.5
Business Studies (BTEC)	100	N/A	N/A	26	100
Business Studies (NQF)	N/A	N/A	100	26	100
Computer Use	88.9	N/A	N/A	36	88.9
Hospitality	100	N/A	N/A	36	88
Numeracy (NQF)	N/A	N/A	100	5	100
Personal Health	N/A	N/A	100	10	100
Practical Craft (OS)	N/A	100	100	38	100
Public Services	N/A	83.3	N/A	6	83.3
Science (General/ Combined) (NQF)	N/A	100	100	66	100
Self Development (COPE)	100	N/A	100	35	100
Sports Studies (BTEC)	100	N/A	N/A	10	100
Travel and Tourism (NQF)	N/A	N/A	100	6	100
Beauty Services (NQF)	N/A	N/A	100	*	100
Practical Craft (NQF)	N/A	N/A	100	*	100

\* indicates fewer than 5 entries over 3 years

**Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level or equivalent (over the past three years) Grades A\* to C**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Number of pupils in Year 14 cohort	38	35	54

<b>A Level Subject or equivalent</b>	<b>Number of entries over three years</b>	<b>School A* to C %</b>	<b>NI A* to C %</b>
Art and Design (NQF)	5	100	N/A
Business (Voc)	23	73.9	86.9
Catering Studies (BTEC)	12	100	N/A
Cache - Childcare Skills (NQF)	31	100	N/A
Drama	8	25	90.4
Health & Social Care	27	55.6	85.5
History	17	47.1	88.3
Learning Skills (KSKL)	5	100	N/A
Media Film and TV Studies	19	42.1	89.3
Politics	5	60	89
Religious Studies	21	66.7	89.6
Science (Voc)	13	69.2	72.2
Sports Studies Extended Diploma (BTEC)	11	100	N/A
Sports Studies Subsidiary Diploma (BTEC)	9	100	N/A
Travel and Tourism (BTEC)	29	100	N/A
Travel and Tourism (NQF)	19	100	N/A
Art and Design (BTEC)	*	75	N/A
Art and Design Photography (GCE/A_3570)	*	100	N/A
Computer Use (BTEC)	*	100	N/A
Computer Use (NQF)	*	100	N/A
Information Technology (Voc)	*	100	87.8
Mathematics	*	100	89.8
Performing Arts	*	0	N/A
Sports Studies (NQF)	*	100	N/A

\* indicates fewer than 5 entries over 3 years

## STAYING ON RATE<sup>5</sup> 2016/17

Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at school compared with the NI average for all schools and for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	48.4%	67.2%
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	75.2%	84.1%

## Leavers' destinations

Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from Mercy College who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for non-selective schools.

	School	NI	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	65	12996			
Employment	15 (23.1%)	1511 (11.6%)			
Further Education	15 (23.1%)	5745 (44.2%)	5	6	4
Higher Education	12 (18.5%)	3051 (23.5%)			12
Work-based Learning (Training)	N/A	1976 (15.2%)			
Unemployed	8 (12.3%)	467 (3.6%)			
Unknown	2 (3.1)	246 (1.9%)			

<sup>5</sup> The 'Staying On Rate' is taken to mean the pupils who stay on at the school from year 12 to year 13 or transfer from year 12 to year 13 in another school; and, then from year 13 to year 14.

### **Inspection methodology and evidence base**

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication, which is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ISEF-Post-Primary>.

Inspectors scrutinised documentation, data and held formal discussions with some pupils (in groups), and some staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents/guardians, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

## Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

### Quantitative terms

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%

### Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

### Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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