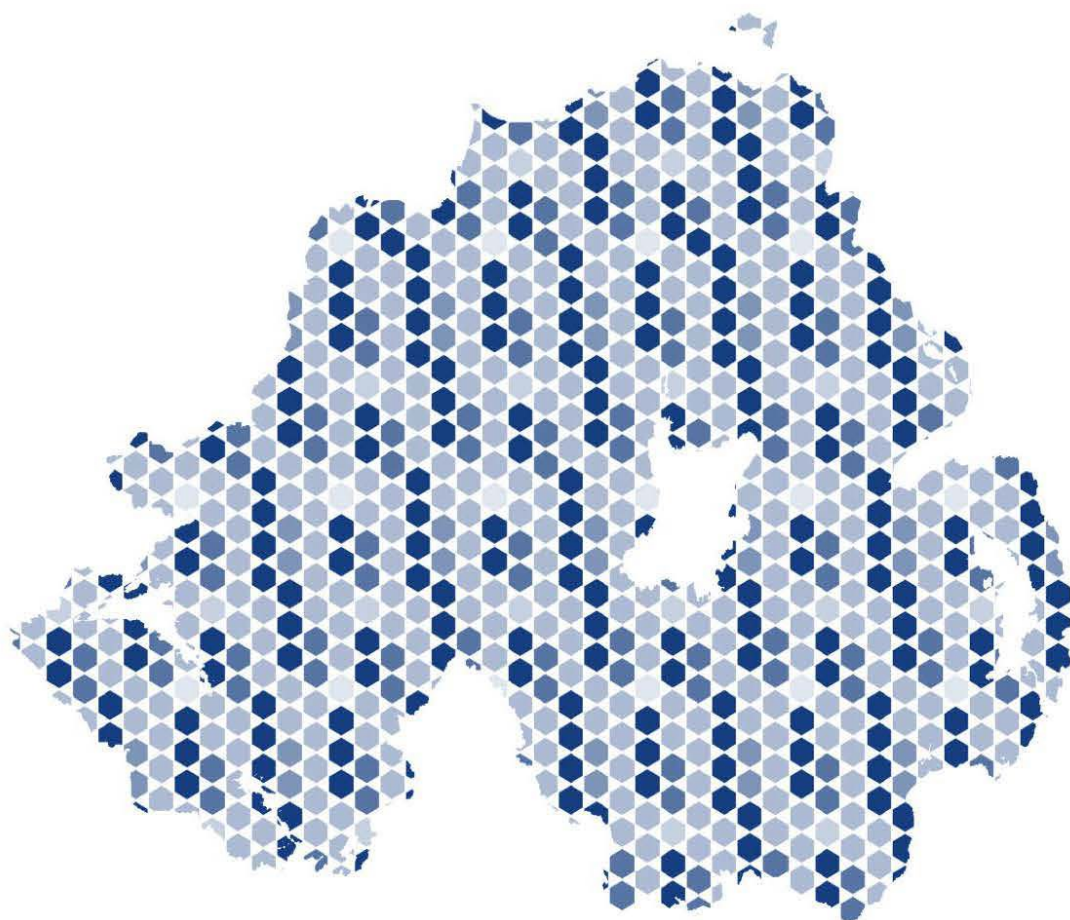# Education and Training Inspectorate
POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

St Mary's High School, Downpatrick, County Down

Maintained, all girls, non-selective 11-18 school   DE Ref No: 423-0023

Report of an Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in November 2019

CONTENTS

Appendices

1.   Context

St Mary's High School draws most of the pupils from the town and the surrounding rural area. Enrolment has remained steady over the last four years, with 63 pupils currently enrolled at post-16; the intake to year 8 rose in 2018 and this increase was sustained in 2019. The provision includes a key stage (KS) 3 moderate learning difficulties (MLD) unit; at the end of KS 3, the pupils from the unit are fully integrated into mainstream classes. A development proposal to amalgamate with two other post-primary schools in the town is at the consultation stage. The school is involved actively in the Lecale area learning community and in two distinct shared education partnerships, one within Downpatrick and the other with a post-primary school in another local town. The school has recently achieved the Rights Respecting Schools Silver Award. There have been changes in senior leadership and, consequently, roles and responsibilities have recently been re-distributed.

The trade unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute and also workload and other management issues. The industrial action includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that none of the teachers would be co-operating with the inspection. The senior leaders and representatives of the board of governors co-operated with the inspection in relation to leadership and safeguarding responsibilities. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the standards of education and professional practice among teachers 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.

St Mary's High School	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Year 8 Intake	73		69		80		81	
Total Enrolment	416		411		419		416	
Attendance (NI Average**)		92.1 (91.8)		93.5 (91.9)		92.1 -		N/A -
Free School Meal Entitlement	177	42.55%	165	40.15%	162	38.66%	148	35.58%
Pupils on SEN Register	91	21.88%	95	23.11%	91	21.72%	68	16.35%
No of Pupils with Statements	17		15		19		18	
No of Newcomer Pupils	*		*		6		8	

* Northern Ireland Statistic & Research Agency: Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools: Detailed Statistics - 2017/18, 2018/19
N/A: Not available.
* Fewer than 5.

2.   Pupils', parents' and staff questionnaire responses

Forty-eight percent of the pupils completed the confidential online questionnaire. While there was a low response rate from pupils in KS 4, nearly one-half of the pupils in KS 3 and most of the KS 5 pupils responded. Overall, the responses were highly positive about their experience of the school, with the pupils recognising how the

school: encourages them to set their own learning goals; provides an inclusive and welcoming environment; and helps them to understand and respect others. Over one-third of the pupils responding provided written comments in which they expressed appreciation for the support and encouragement they receive from their teachers.

Just over 4% of parents responded to the online questionnaire. Almost all of the responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with their children's progress and the positive regard for the school within the local community. One-half of the parents provided additional written comments which affirmed the care and support provided by staff.

The very few individual concerns raised through the pupil and parent questionnaires have been discussed with the principal and representatives from the board of governors.

Overall, 20% of staff responded to the online questionnaires; the responses were mostly positive.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the learners;

- 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.

The focus of the inspection was on English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy.

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 provision in English and literacy, and mathematics and numeracy; and

- the quality and impact of the provision for care, welfare and support of the pupils.

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

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

5. Outcomes for learners

- The pupils engage respectfully with visitors to the school and are confident in expressing their views. The senior pupils reflect maturely on their experience of school and develop leadership skills by acting as, for example, mentors, form captains, school councillors and senior prefects. They enjoy participating in shared education partnerships with two local schools and also spoke about the benefit of participating in a joint pupil council to explore matters such as emotional health and wellbeing.

- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C (including equivalents) has fluctuated in recent years. In 2019, almost all of the pupils attained at this level.

- Over the same period, a majority of pupils attained five or more GCSE qualifications (including equivalents) at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. In 2019, most of the pupils, including those entitled to free school meals, attained at this level.

- The outcomes attained by the pupils in a majority of the individual subjects at GCSE grades A* to C are in line with or above the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) subject averages (in those subjects for which there are corresponding NI subject averages), with around one-third being well above.

- In two of the last three years, the proportion of pupils attaining three or more GCE A level qualifications (including equivalents) at grades A* to C has been below the NI average (for schools in the same free school meals band). The school has identified appropriately the need to improve the outcomes attained by the pupils at this level.

- While a majority of the individual subjects at A level, at grades A* to C, are performing in line with or above the corresponding NI subject averages (in those subjects for which there are corresponding NI subject averages), it should be noted that small numbers of pupils undertook more than one-half of these subjects.

- Most of the pupils stay on between year 12 and year 13; this retention rate is significantly above the NI average. A majority of pupils who complete their post-16 programme progress to higher education.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the standards attained by the pupils in English and literacy and mathematics and numeracy;

- the progression in the pupils' learning; and

- the pupils' wider skills and dispositions.

6. **Quality of provision**

- The pupils who met with inspectors report that they enjoy their learning and are supported well by the staff. They value the 'learning conversations' with staff which enable them to reflect on their progress and achievements. They appreciate opportunities to express their views about aspects of school life through the school council.

- The curriculum at KS 3 is broad and balanced. It includes a focus on developing the pupils' entrepreneurial and digital skills, including coding. Through collaboration within the Lecale area learning community, the curriculum at KS 4 and post-16 meets the entitlement framework. Pupils returning to post-16 have been able to take one of the following options: a two-year programme following A-level (including equivalent) courses; a one-year transition programme following a GSCE (including equivalent) curriculum, and incorporating a level 3 qualification; and a year 15 option for pupils requiring an additional year to complete their post-16 courses.

- The school uses a range of internal and external information to support pupils in choosing their subjects and career pathways. The provision for careers is delivered through the employability strand of Learning for Life and Work at KS 3 and KS 4, and through discrete careers lessons in years 10, 12, 13 and 14. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke positively about: the support and guidance they receive from their teachers when making subject choices in years 10 and 12; their work experience in years 12 and 13; and their opportunities to research, investigate and experience possible careers through a planned programme of careers events involving guest speakers, mock interviews and engagement with a range of external providers.

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 and assessment in promoting 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 across the school; and,

- the impact of care and welfare on teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leaders articulate a clear shared vision for school improvement, have complementary strengths and work collegially to monitor and evaluate the ongoing development work within the school.

- The senior leaders consult appropriately with pupils, parents, staff and governors to inform the school development planning process. The school development plan is thorough and based firmly on evaluations complemented by extensive supporting evidence. As the school prepares for the next cycle of improvement planning, it will be important that the improvement work set down in the new school development plan is sustainable and includes the provision for the MLD unit. There is variability in the quality of action plans; a consistent focus on a smaller number of targets, with more specific measures, will enable staff to assess accurately, and celebrate, the progress made against the targets.

- The board of governors has recently been reconstituted. Its members have a wide range of skills and experience, enabling them to support the development work within the school. While they are well informed about the life and work of the school, they have identified the need to monitor more closely the school's progress in achieving strategic priorities. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.

- It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff continue to plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, including post-16 provision, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the effectiveness and impact of the senior leadership of the school;

- the effectiveness and impact of middle leadership; and

- the effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement.

8.   Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. Appropriately, the school has identified the need to establish a schedule for managing the review of safeguarding-related policies. Owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the school's arrangements for safeguarding. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe in school. They know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

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 pupils. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

Examination performance and other statistical data

Data Year 12 performance

GCSE and GCSE Equivalent Subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE and Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100	98.1	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	76.4	66	93.2
*The NI average for non-grammar schools in the same FSM band**	78.9	79.5	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	62.5	64.2	83.1
*The NI average for non-grammar schools in the same FSM band**	45	52.5	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	97.2	94.3	100
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to FSM achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A - C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	48	31.8	78.9

* Median for each year from the Department of Education benchmarking Quartiles for non-grammar schools in the same FSM band.
BENCHMARKING DATA GCSE & Level 3 Post-primary Schools 2016/17
BENCHMARKING DATA GCSE & Level 3 Post-primary Schools 2017/18

Year 12 GCSE (including equivalent) examination outcomes

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Number of pupils in Year 12 cohort	72	53	59

Subject	Number of Entries over three years	School Three-year average A* to C	Northern Ireland Three-year average A* to C
Art & Design (GCSE/FC_3510)	47	87.2	78.8
Business (BTNG/A2_AA3)	*	100.0	N/A
Business (BTNG/A2_AA3)	*	100.0	N/A
Computer Architecture (BTNG/A12_CJ3)	25	92.0	N/A
English Language (GCSE/FC_5030)	183	78.1	78.7
English Literature (GCSE/FC_5110)	59	96.6	88.7
French (GCSE/FC_5650)	16	93.8	75.9
Geography (GCSE/FC_3910)	55	52.7	72.0
History (GCSE/FC_4010)	50	92.0	69.4
Home Economics: Child Development (GCSE/FC_3330)	47	48.9	N/A
Information Technology (GCSE/FC_2650)	42	78.6	77.7
Irish (GCSE/FC_5550)	*	100.0	94.3
Learning for Life and Work (GCSE/FC_4810)	152	83.6	82.8
Mathematics (GCSE/FC_2210)	183	79.2	54.9
Mathematics Further (GCSE/FC_2330)	*	71.4	88.2
Media (GCSE/FC_5350)	41	61.0	71.8
Music (GCSE/FC_7010)	*	50.0	81.0
OS: Business (COA/B_OS01)	*	75.0	N/A
OS: Design (COA/B_OS03)	*	88.9	N/A
OS: Environment (COA/B_OS05)	26	73.1	N/A
Personal Health (NVQ/L2_HJ1)	30	100.0	N/A
Polish (GCSE/9FC_6070)	*	100.0	N/A
Preparation for Adult Life (COA/B_4810)	29	96.6	N/A
Religious Studies (GCSE/FC_4610)	144	74.3	76.0
Science Additional (GCSE/FC_1320)	23	91.3	N/A
Science Double Award (GCSE/DA_1370)	34	97.1	85.0
Science Single Award ((GCSE/FC_1310)	119	89.9	73.8
Spanish (GCSE/FC_5750)	26	100.0	83.8
Sports Studies (BTNG/A12_MA1)	19	100.0	N/A
Statistics (GCSE/FC_2510)	68	80.9	N/A
Travel and Tourism (BTNG/A12_NK1)	32	93.8	N/A

*Indicates fewer than 10 entries over three years

Data Year 14 performance

GCE A Level or equivalent	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Percentage of Year 14 taking A levels and Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	90.3	92.6	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A levels	45.16	48.2	48.8
*The NI average for non-grammar schools in the same FSM band**	52.5	54.2	N/A
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A levels	100	100	100

* Median for each year from the Department of Education benchmarking Quartiles for non-grammar schools in the same FSM band.
BENCHMARKING DATA GCSE & Level 3 Post-primary Schools 2016/17
BENCHMARKING DATA GCSE & Level 3 Post-primary Schools 2017/18

Year 14 A-level (including equivalent) examination outcomes

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Number of pupils in Year 14 cohort	31	27	43

Subject	Number of Entries over three years	School Three-year average A* to C	Northern Ireland Three-average A* to C
Applied Science (BTEC/SD3_RA14)	11	72.7	N/A
Art & Design (GCE/A_3510)	15	93.3	93.7
Business Studies (BTEC/SD3_AA3)	28	96.4	N/A
Business Studies (GCE A_3210)	*	100.0	89.1
Computer Use (CAMT/ID3_CN1)	10	100.0	N/A
Information Technology (GCE/A_2650)	10	100.0	75.8
English Language & Literature (GCE/A_5010)	18	33.3	N/A
English Literature (GCE/A_5110)	*	100.0	87.5
Geography (GCE/A_3910)	*	0.0	90.1
Health & Social Care (GCE/A_0003)	82	85.4	90.0
IT/Art:Moving Image Art (GCE/A_8210)	*	50.0	N/A
Mathematics (GCE/A_2210)	*	100.0	90.9
Media Film and TV Studies (GCE/A_5350)	35	45.7	84.7
Moving Image Art (GCE/A_8210)	*	50.0	N/A
Religious Studies (GCE/A_4610)	20	65.0	89.1
Sport/PE Studies (GCE/A_7210)	*	0.0	N/A
Sport Studies (BTEC/SD3_MA1)	*	100.0	N/A
Sports Science (GCE/A_MA11)	*	100.0	N/A
Travel & Tourism (BTEC/SD3_NK1)	47	100.0	N/A

*Indicates fewer than 10 entries over three years

Staying on rate 2018/19

% Yr12 staying on to Yr13	79.7	NI Av. Year 13	48.7
% Yr13 staying on to Yr14	69.7	NI Av. Year 14	74.2

Leavers' Destinations 2017/18

	NI No & %	School No & %	NI Yr12 No & %	School Yr12 No & %	NI Yr13 No & %	School Yr13 No & %	NI Yr14 No & %	School Yr14 No & %	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 and above (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	11802 100%	62 100%	5547 100%	12 100%	1275 100%	19 100%	4980 100%	31 100%			
Employment	1562 13.2%	6 8.2%	391 7%	0 0%	322 25.3%	* *	849 17%	* *			
Institute of Further Education	5159 43.7%	24 32.9%	3417 61.6%	# #	588 46.1%	11 57.9%	1154 23.2%	* *	11	10	0
Institute of Higher Education**	2622 22.2%	20 27.4%	* *	0 0%	* *	0 0%	# #	20 64.5%		0	20
Training***	1823 15.4%	0 0%	1445 26.1%	0 0%	209 16.4%	0 0%	169 3.4%	0 0%			
Unemployment	391 3.3%	5 6.8%	156 2.8%	0 0%	90 7.1%	* *	145 2.9%	* *			
Others	245 2.1%	7 14.1%	138 2.5%	* *	# #	* *	# #	* *			

Source for NI data: Destination of School Leavers by year group, 2017/18 NON-GRAMMAR SCHOOLS (excludes special and independent schools).
* Fewer than 5 cases.
# Figures supressed.
** Includes universities and teacher training colleges.
*** Numbers entering training include those entering the Training for Success programme, operated by the Department for the Economy. Training on Training for Success is delivered by a range of training providers, including Further Education Colleges. Training for Success trainees who receive training at Further Education Colleges are recorded as being in training and not in Further Education. This convention avoids double counting of Training for Success trainees.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication is available on the ETI website.

The arrangements for this inspection included: a meeting with representatives from the governors; formal discussions with some pupils (in groups), meetings with the senior leadership; review of documentation and data; and the opportunity for all pupils, parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments	Percentage with comments
Pupil	200	48.1%	79	39.5%
Parents	15	3.6%	7	46.7%
Teacher	*	20%	*	0%
Support staff	8	34%	*	0%

* fewer than 5 returns

The tabulated SIMS information and the tables for Year 12 and Year 14 examination outcomes in individual subjects have been verified by the school.

GCSE Grading 2019

The Department of Education has indicated there are no plans to change school performance measures at A*-C with the introduction of the new C* grade. For GCSEs graded 9-1 this performance measure will be 9-4. For the ETI, data on performance in public examinations continues to be only one of the measures that contributes to the evaluation of outcomes for learners.

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management (and the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable):

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

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on governance:

High degree of confidence
Confidence
Limited confidence

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on safeguarding:

Reflects the guidance
Reflects broadly the guidance
Unsatisfactory

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

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.