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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

Belfast High School

Inspected: January 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Belfast High School is a selective co-educational voluntary grammar school situated in the borough of Newtownabbey. The school draws its pupils from a wide surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the enrolment was 928 pupils, approximately 2.4% of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 22 of the pupils who have special educational needs. Over the past five years approximately 76% of the year 8 intake obtained a grade A in the Transfer Procedure.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school, and, in addition, on the provision for modern languages, English and history. The inspection also evaluated the school's provision for pastoral care, including child protection and the school's general approach to promoting healthy eating. As part of the inspection, the school's action planning and provision for their Specialist Schools' status in modern languages was also evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, GOVERNORS, TEACHERS AND PUPILS

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching 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, 12, 13 and 14.

One hundred and eighty-nine questionnaires were issued to the parents; 36% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE), 35 of which contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated strong satisfaction with the work of the school; in particular, they mentioned the high esteem with which the school is held in the local community and the supportive and caring ethos.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) also met with almost all the representatives of the governors. The governors expressed their appreciation of the positive ethos within the school and the school's reputation in the local community.

Just under half of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire. All of the returns from the teachers expressed their support for the work of the Principal and the senior leadership team and almost all highlighted the good working relationships throughout the school and the support for the pupils.

In discussions held with the pupils, they talked of their appreciation of the support provided by their teachers and the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils. They reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their care and well-being.

The Inspectorate has reported to the Principal and the governors about the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which reflect fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars. The lead personnel in pastoral care and child protection are effective in their roles and provide good leadership to those who perform the head of year and form tutor roles.

1.5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example the healthy eating policy, the International Cuisine cookery club and access to drinking water, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. An assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the school development plan (SDP) in order to comply with statutory regulations.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS

The school offers a good range of subjects at both General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level. Overall the standards achieved by the pupils across the subjects at GCSE level are good. In 2007, around 96% of the pupils achieved grades A*-C in at least seven GCSE subjects, which is above the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. The results for almost all of the subjects were within 5% or better of the NI average.

At GCE A level there is variation in the results achieved by the pupils across the subjects. In 2007, approximately 70% of pupils obtained grades A-C in at least three subjects, which is below the average for similar schools. While these results have shown a steady improvement over the last three years, the results in a minority of subjects were 5% or more below the NI averages. The Principal and the senior leadership team have identified appropriately the standards achieved, particularly at GCE A level, as a priority for improvement; the inspection findings endorse the school's focus for ensuring greater rigour and a more systematic approach to the use of comparative pupil and class performance data in identifying under achievement. More details about the examination results are provided in Appendix 3.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of a significant majority of the teaching was always satisfactory and in a minority of the lessons observed, the teaching ranged from good to, in a few instances, excellent. In the best practice clear planning had built upon previous learning with high quality questioning promoting the pupils' thinking; differentiated tasks allowed pupils to work at their own pace with their teachers supporting effectively the pupils' progress. In a significant

minority of lessons the teaching and learning activities were over-directed by the teacher and lacked the pace and challenge necessary to actively involve and motivate fully all of the pupils. There is a lack of a wider professional debate across the whole school to reflect on and share amongst all staff how effective learning practices can raise standards. More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The senior leadership team, comprising of the Principal, three deputy Principals and an assistant Principal, are committed, hard-working and function well as a mutually supportive and cohesive team.

The new Principal, who has been in post from September 2006, has introduced a number of appropriate school improvement initiatives. There is a need, however, to embed a culture of self-evaluation at all levels within the school to inform the SDP processes, which are at an early stage of development. There is also a need to establish stronger collaborative partnerships across the school, to enable all staff to contribute to school improvement. The self-evaluation reports prepared by staff prior to the inspection provide a useful start to involving all staff in the SDP process including the implementation and regular review of agreed action plans.

The school has recently prepared an interim SDP which sets out a range of priorities for school improvement; this needs to be developed further to meet more fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order.

2.4 SPECIALIST SCHOOLS' STATUS

Belfast High School was selected to take part in the specialist schools' programme, beginning in September 2007. The programme aims to develop the concept of specialist schools tailored to meet the particular needs of Northern Ireland's education system. The school selected modern languages as its specialist focus.

The school has identified appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate that modern languages are an area of clear curricular strength, which has good levels of attainment.

For the purpose of showing improvement more clearly the school needs to review the targets set in order to be able to demonstrate, in a measurable way, how:

- the strengths in modern languages have the potential to promote quality teaching and learning and whole-school development;
- the strategic management of the specialist school status can envision, guide and support staff in target setting, evaluating, and in action planning; and
- the school will use modern languages to develop existing links with the wider community, including business and industry.

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school as part of the Specialist Schools' Programme.

3. **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

The strengths of the school include:

- the effective communication and reporting structures between the governors and the Principal;
- the breadth of curricular provision at key stage 4 and post-16 level;
- the good standards achieved by the pupils in GCSE;
- the very good quality of the provision for pastoral care;
- the friendly, well-mannered and co-operative pupils; and
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities.

The main areas for development include the need:

- to promote greater consistency in teaching approaches within and across departments to enable the pupils to become more independent and take more responsibility for their own learning; and
- to develop a more rigorous self-evaluative process for monitoring and developing the effectiveness of learning and teaching, including through the implementation of the plans for the school's specialist status.

4. **CONCLUSION**

In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Pastoral Care and Child Protection

The strengths of the work include:

- the commitment of almost all the staff to the high quality care and welfare of the pupils;
- the good behaviour and courtesy of the pupils;
- the arrangements for child protection which reflect fully the relevant DE circulars;
- the quality of the work and support provided by the members of the pastoral care team and, in particular, the heads of year and form tutors; and
- the effective and committed leadership and management provided by the co-ordinators for pastoral care and child protection.

The area for development includes the need:

- to implement more robust processes to self-evaluate the quality of and developments in pastoral care.

English

The strengths of the work include:

- the good overall standard of teaching observed;
- the standards of English achieved by the pupils, especially in reading and writing;
- the standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations in English subjects; and
- the quality of leadership and management of the English department.

History

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between teachers and pupils;
- the team spirit and commitment of the teachers within the department; and

- the timely review of standards and practice in which the department is currently engaged.

The areas for development include the need:

- to give careful consideration to effective teaching and learning in order to promote greater challenge amongst the pupils; and
- to adopt a more rigorous approach to marking for improvement across all year groups.

Modern Languages

The school has identified appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate that modern languages is an area of clear curricular strength, which has good levels of attainment. These strengths include:

- the examples of effective teaching observed during the inspection;
- the good response of most of the pupils;
- the good levels of attainment achieved by the pupils in public examinations;
- the good progress made in integrating information and communication technology to support and enhance learning and teaching; and
- the good range of external links which provide the pupils with meaningful experiences outside the classroom and which support them in their learning.

The areas for development include the need:

- to disseminate further the examples of good practice within the department; and
- to develop and extend further the use of the target language by the teachers and the pupils.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: **Belfast High** v. Date of Inspection: **W/C 21.01.08**
 ii. School Reference Number: **342-0077** vi. Area of Study: **Standard Inspection**
 iii. Age Range: **11-18**
 iv. Status: **Voluntary Grammar**

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	138	139	135	137	139
Total enrolment	932	926	919	927	928

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	96.5	95.8	94.9	94.6	94.9	94.6	93	95	95

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

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	65	67	69	68	65	45	44	423
Enrolment: Girls	74	70	70	75	74	75	67	505
Enrolment: Total	139	137	139	143	139	120	111	928
PTR	16.80	16.62	16.32	14.06	15.64	12.21	10.92	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2006/07) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	87.1	NI Av Year 13	88.8
Year 14	82.6	NI Av Year 14	85.0

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2005/06	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	22		110	
Another School	14%	17.2	0%	1
Employment	9%	4.3	7%	4.6
Full-time Further Education	77%	58.5	11%	9.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	74%	80.0
Full-time Training	0%	15.4	1%	1.1
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.9	7%	0.9
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.8	0%	1.8

APPENDIX 3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Belfast High School **SCHOOL YEAR:** 2007/2008

GCSE	2005	2006	2007
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 7 subjects	92.7	92.03	95.62
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	96.35	96.38	99.27
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	60.18	69	69.3
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	84	86	90.3

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2005, 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 5 and 10 percentage points below	More than 10 percentage points below
GCSE A*-C	German Spanish	Motor Vehicle Studies Physics Religious Studies Single Award Science	Additional Mathematics Art and Design Chemistry Chinese Classical Civilisation Double Award Science 1 st Subject English English Literature French Geography Greek History Home Economics Home Economics/Child Development Information Technology Latin Mathematics Music Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design	Biology	Business Studies

GCE A Level A-C	Biology Chemistry Physics	Business Studies French German Music Spanish	Art and Design Chinese English Literature Geography Greek History Mathematics Further Mathematics Politics Religious Studies Design and Technology	Sport/PE Studies	Classical Civilisation Computer Studies/Computing Home Economics Information Technology Latin
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Table showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.

Table 2

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A*-C	Art and Design Biology Chemistry Chinese English Greek Home Economics/Child Development Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Business Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Latin Motor Vehicle Studies Physics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design	Classical Civilisation German Single Award Science		

<p>GCE A Level A-C</p>	<p>Chinese Greek</p>	<p>Art and Design Business Studies English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography German History Latin Mathematics Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish</p>	<p>Biology Chemistry Classical Civilisation Design and Technology Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport/PE Studies</p>		<p>Computer Studies/Computing</p>
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