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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education**  
**Department for Employment and Learning**  
**Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Standard Inspection**

**Coláiste Feirste**  
**Belfast**

**Inspected: February 2007**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT

Coláiste Feirste is a non-selective, 11-18, co-educational school offering education through the medium of Irish. The school is situated on an elevated site off the Falls Road, overlooking the Beechmount area of west Belfast. Most of the pupils come from the greater Belfast area; a small number travel to school from Crumlin, Glenavy, Downpatrick, Coalisland and Maghera. The enrolment has increased steadily and stands currently at 487; there is a small sixth form of 41 pupils. Just over 38% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. In the last three years around 20% of the pupils entering year 8 obtained grades A, B or C in the Transfer Test; the remainder gained either a grade D or did not sit the test. The school has identified some 20% of pupils who require additional help with their learning. The school's new and recently refurbished accommodation provides an excellent environment for learning and teaching.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels and on the school's capacity for self-evaluation. Specialist visits took place in mathematics, science and information and communications technology. In addition, the inspection included an examination of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs, the arrangements for pastoral care including child protection, and the promotion of health and well-being among the pupils.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, GOVERNORS, PUPILS AND TEACHERS

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the completion of questionnaires by a sample of the parents, as well as meetings with the Board of Governors (BoG), and discussions with groups of pupils from years 8, 12 and the sixth form. Prior to the inspection, confidential questionnaires were sent to 120 parents; 16.6% of the parents responded, with approximately 50% of those taking the opportunity to write additional comments. The parents and governors indicated, in nearly all cases, strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The pupils reported that they felt happy and secure in the school. The few matters raised by the parents in the questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and the BoG. Sixteen teachers also completed confidential questionnaires; their responses raised serious concerns about leadership and communication in the school. These matters are dealt with below.

The school has a few strengths in its provision for pastoral care and child protection but there are important areas for improvement which require prompt action to ensure that the procedures are fully in line with the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education (DE) Circulars. In particular, the school needs to ensure that:

- the designated teachers, staff and governors receive appropriate training in child protection matters;
- the parents and pupils are made aware of the procedures to be followed in a child protection issue; and

- there is a code of conduct adopted by the staff.

The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has some sound features, including an appropriate range of opportunities for all the pupils to participate in physical activities. Food-related initiatives are, however, limited and strategic policies to encourage healthy life-styles and the participation of pupils in physical activity are not yet established. In order to comply with statutory school development planning regulations, it is important for the school, as a matter of urgency, to complete an assessment of the nature and quality of the promotion of health and well-being among the pupils.

#### 1.4 EXAMINATION RESULTS

All of the pupils in year 12 pupils are entered for five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. In the last three years, more than two-fifths of the pupils obtained grade C or above in at least five subjects, and four-fifths obtained grade E or above. In 2006, 42.9% of pupils achieved grades A\* to C in at least five GCSE subjects. When compared with schools of a similar Free Schools Meals index, these results are good. The school offers 15 subjects to GCSE level. Over the last three years, in the majority of these subjects the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A\* to E was within, or above, five percentage points of the respective Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools.

The school offers 12 subjects at General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A2 level. The total number of pupils in the sixth-form is 41 and class sizes in individual subjects are mostly small. The proportion of pupils in year 14 obtaining grade E or above in at least 2 A levels has declined in recent years and stands at 88.9%, which is well below the corresponding average for similar schools. At GCE A level or equivalent, the pupils' performance at grades A to E in the majority of subjects was five percentage points, or more, below the NI average.

## 2. MAIN FINDINGS

### 2.1 The strengths of Coláiste Feirste include:

- the emphasis placed by the school on raising the self-esteem of the pupils;
- the very good behaviour of the majority of pupils;
- the commitment of the staff to the ethos of the school;
- the commitment and dedication of the staff in the subject areas inspected;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was always satisfactory, and sound or better in a significant minority of classes;
- the effective involvement of subject teachers in the arrangements to support pupils with special educational needs;
- the good results achieved by the school in GCSE examinations; and
- the strong links with external agencies and the local community.

## 2.2 Areas for improvement include:

- the urgent need for the school to bring its arrangements for child protection into line with DE guidance;
- the need for the school to ensure effective support for beginning teachers and for teachers working beyond their specialisms; and
- the need to address the serious weaknesses in the quality and effectiveness of leadership:
  - the need to promote more open, professional links and effective communication between senior management, middle management, teachers and BoG where they all feel valued; to define clearly the roles of all managers in the school; and
  - the need to agree whole-school priorities; to formulate a strategic school development plan focusing on the quality of learning and teaching, set in a context of staff development and sound financial planning in order to ensure that the school's provision meets more fully the needs of all pupils. The school has been slow to address a number of important areas including the process of school development planning, self-evaluation leading to improvement, the process of Performance Review and Staff Development, target setting and benchmarking.

## 3. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the inspection has identified major shortcomings in the school's work. The areas for improvement need to be addressed urgently in the interests of the learners.

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

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Coláiste Feirste v. Date of Inspection: W/C 19.02.07  
 ii. School Reference Number: 124-0291 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Secondary Maintained

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 8 Intake	84	105	91	106	89
Total enrolment	364	406	442	470	487

1.3 Attendance

Year 2005/06	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2005/06	NI Average 2004/05
% Attendance	93.4	90	91	89	92	93	94.4	91	91

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:  iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact):
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):  iv. Numbers of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused Only)

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	44	52	43	40	32	12	7	230
Enrolment: Girls	45	53	43	59	36	11	10	257
Enrolment: Total	89	105	86	99	68	23	17	487
PTR	14.901	14.064	14.399	14.4	12.65	7.859	7.028	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2005/06) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	34.4	NI Av Year 13	35.5
Year 14	44.6	NI Av Year 14	24.9

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2004/05	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	39		30	
Another School	21%	8.2	7%	1.1
Employment	3%	10.9	7%	17.5
Full-time Further Education	38%	36.8	27%	21.1
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	57%	44.1
Full-time Training	26%	34.3	0%	5.7
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	6.3	3%	5.6
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	13%	3.6	0%	4.8

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Coláiste Feirste

SCHOOL YEAR: 2006/2007

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects</b>	100	100	100
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</b>	40.6	51.7	42.9
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</b>	85.9	93.1	77.6
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels</b>	11.1	19.2	14.8
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels</b>	100	96.2	88.9

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Within this report, when commenting on examination results of individual subjects, the respective CCEA average is used as a proxy for the corresponding average for all pupils in NI taking that subject.

**TABLE 1 showing GCSE and subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2006, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages.**

	<b>More than 10 percentage points above</b>	<b>Between 5 and 10 percentage points above</b>	<b>Within 5 percentage points</b>	<b>Between 5 and 10 percentage points below</b>	<b>More than 10 percentage points below</b>
GCSE A* - E	French	English Irish Music	Art and Design English Literature Information Technology Science Double Award 1st Subject Science Single Award Sport/PE Studies	History Mathematics Personal and Social Education	Business Studies Design and Technology Geography
GCE A Level A-C	French Irish Music Sport/PE Studies		Art and Design Information Technology Personal and Social Education	English History Science Double Award	Business Studies Design and Technology English Literature Geography Mathematics Science Single Award



	<b>More than 10 percentage points above</b>	<b>Between 5 and 10 percentage points above</b>	<b>Within 5 percentage points</b>	<b>Between 5 and 10 percentage points below</b>	<b>More than 10 percentage points below</b>
GCE A Level A-E			Chemistry French Irish Physics	Art and Design History	Biology English Literature Geography Information Technology Mathematics Politics
GCE A Level A-C	Chemistry	Irish			Art and Design Biology English Literature French Geography History Information Technology Mathematics Physics Politics

**APPENDIX 3**

**Table 2 showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.**

	<b>100%-96%</b>	<b>95%-86%</b>	<b>85%-76%</b>	<b>75%-66%</b>	<b>65%-0%</b>
GCSE A*-C	Art & Design, Biology, Drama, English, History, Information Technology, Mathematics, Music	Business Studies, Chemistry, Computer Studies/ Computing, Design & Technology, Economics, English Literature, French, Geography, Home Economics, Latin, Additional Mathematics, Physics, Religious Studies, Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject, Spanish, Sport/PE Studies	German, Geology		
GCE A Level A-C	Art & Design	Drama, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, History of Art & Design, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Music, Politics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Biology, Chemistry, Design and Technology, Economics, Home Economics, Latin, Physics		Computer Studies/ Computing, Geology

<p>GCE A Level A-E</p>	<p>Art &amp; Design, Biology, Chemistry, Design and Technology, Drama, Economics, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, History of Art &amp; Design, Home Economics, Latin, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Music, Physics, Politics, Religious Studies, Spanish</p>	<p>Computer Studies/Computing, Geology</p>			
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