



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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*Providing Inspection Services for*  
**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**

**Cookstown High School  
Co Tyrone**

**Inspected: February 2009**

## CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK	2
3.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	4
4.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	4
5.	CONCLUSION	5
	APPENDICES	

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 CONTEXT**

Cookstown High school is a controlled non-selective co-educational school providing education for 11-18 year old pupils. The enrolment has declined over recent years and currently stands at 968. The pupils are drawn from the town of Cookstown and the surrounding rural area; almost all of the pupils who transfer to the school do not participate in the Transfer Procedure. Approximately 11% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and 142 (15%) of the pupils require additional support with aspects of their learning.

In addition there is a learning support centre (LSC) in the school which caters for 34 pupils with moderate learning difficulties.

### **1.2 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS**

The arrangements for the inspection of child protection and pastoral care included the opportunity for the parents, teaching, and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. In addition to meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), groups of pupils from years 8, 12, 13 and 14 were interviewed. One hundred and ninety six questionnaires were issued to the parents, 27% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 31 of these contained additional written comments. Most of the responses from the questionnaires, and almost one-half of the written comments from the parents, were highly supportive of the work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the care and attention of the teachers to the needs of their children, the development of the pupils' self confidence and the high regard in which the school is held by the local community. The parents of pupils in the LSC reported their appreciation of the dedication and commitment of the teachers and the high level of care and support provided for pupils with special educational needs. In over half of the written comments, the main concerns expressed by the parents were in relation to teacher absences, inconsistencies in communication with the school and issues relating to the quality of teaching and learning.

Almost two-thirds of the teachers and 23 of the support staff completed a confidential questionnaire, with 32 providing additional written comments. The staff responded positively on a range of issues including the achievements of the pupils in public examinations, their satisfaction in working in the school and the positive working relationships between the teachers and pupils. Approximately two-thirds of the staff who responded raised concerns related to the quality of leadership and management, internal communication, staff welfare and issues around the quality of the accommodation.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, all the issues emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff questionnaires. The main elements of these are dealt with in the body of the report.

The governors were positive about the work of the school and expressed their support for the strong links with the local community, the academic success of the pupils and the support of the parents for the work of the school.

In the discussions held with the pupils, they talked enthusiastically about the support they receive from the teachers, the mutual respect between pupils and staff and the friendly atmosphere within the school. There is clear evidence to show that they are aware of what to do and who to talk to if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

### 1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the learning, teaching, leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for pupils in English, mathematics and art and design. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and the arrangements for the inclusion of these pupils in all aspects of school life were also inspected. The school's provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were evaluated, as was the school's approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As additional evidence for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in a range of other subjects. A summary of the main findings for the specialist subject areas under focus can be found in Appendix 1.

## 2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

### 2.1 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

Most of the pupils achieve very good standards in public examinations. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools. Over the same period, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades at GCSE A\*-C including mathematics and English has risen steadily and is also well above the respective NI average. This strong performance reflects the hard work of the pupils and the commitment and high expectations of the staff.

The school also offers provision for applied and vocational qualifications at key stage 4. Over the past three years, approximately 10% of pupils in year 12 left school with no accredited qualifications for the next stage of their education. The provision and expectations for these pupils need to be monitored closely in order to promote improvement.

The proportion of pupils who gained grades C or above in at least three GCE A levels over the last three years is more than five percentage points below the NI average for grammar schools. There has been a decrease in these outcomes over this period. There is a wide variation in GCE performance across the subjects in comparison to the corresponding NI averages; a majority of subjects are within or above five percentage points of the NI average. The school has begun to broaden the range of subjects on offer at post-16. The Inspectorate endorses this as an appropriate priority.

More details of the examination results can be found in Appendix 3.

## 2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Most of the teaching in the lessons observed was good or better. In the best practice, lessons were characterised by the sharing of meaningful learning intentions to help the pupils focus on and reflect on their learning. These lessons were well planned to incorporate a range of challenging and relevant learning opportunities which engaged the pupils during the whole of the session.

In the less effective practice, in almost one-quarter of the lessons, there was a lack of pace and challenge, with insufficient account taken of the range of abilities within the class.

The school, through its own processes of self-evaluation, has begun to disseminate some of the existing good practice across the school by sharing effective strategies for learning and teaching, in order to actively involve and challenge all of the pupils. The Inspectorate endorses this as a key priority.

## 2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The many strengths include the supportive ethos, the atmosphere of mutual respect which is evident between staff and pupils throughout the school, and the comprehensive programme for year 8 induction. In all social areas of the school the behaviour of the pupils is excellent; the pupils move about the school freely and with a sense of order. The Vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care leads effectively and is supported well by the year heads who are committed to the care and welfare of the pupils. This team works hard to provide the best opportunities for the pupils in relation to Personal Development and are prepared to trial, monitor and evaluate different approaches in this important area.

## 2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE

## 2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, a School Council that is committed to food issues and a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in sport. The areas for improvement identified include the need to devise a whole-school food policy to guide and support the development of healthy eating programmes throughout the school, and to include an assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school development plan (SDP), in order to comply with statutory regulations.

## 2.6 SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS/INCLUSION

The staff in the LSC are led effectively by the head of the LSC and there is good co-operation and team-work evident between the teachers and support staff. The pupils benefit from a wide range of appropriate, well planned, educational, social, sporting and cultural experiences. They achieve good standards and the LSC staff have high expectations for their

work and behaviour while always aware of the need to meet pupils' individual special educational needs. The pupils integrate well throughout the school and there is good communication between LSC staff and the teachers in the mainstream classes.

The special educational needs co-ordinator works closely with colleagues across the school to promote understanding of how best to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Information is disseminated effectively to guide the work with these pupils and there is developing ownership of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) across the departments. There is a need for the staff to develop a shared understanding of the nature and purpose of IEPs in order to promote consistent practice. The quality of provision for those pupils with statements of educational need is good and the majority of teachers work hard to include all pupils with special educational needs and differentiate work so that the pupils benefit from the lessons.

The staff should review and evaluate the range of accreditation opportunities for special educational needs pupils, including LSC pupils, in order to improve the options and pathways available to them on leaving school.

### **3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The members of the senior leadership team (SLT), comprising of the Principal, two Vice-principals and two senior teachers are hard-working and committed to the life and work of the school. The Principal, who has been in post from February 2007, has overseen a number of appropriate school improvement initiatives. There is a need for greater prioritisation of these initiatives and for all staff to work collectively and collegiately on addressing the priorities identified by this inspection and to continue to develop and embed a culture of self-evaluation at all levels within the school to inform the school development planning processes. In this work, it will be important for the Principal to establish better communication between the SLT and all staff including the provision of well targeted and appropriate professional development opportunities to enable senior and middle managers to contribute more effectively to the process of school improvement. The self-evaluation reports prepared prior to the inspection provide a useful start for most departments to share and take responsibility for improvement.

The SDP 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.

### **4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

The main strengths of the school include:

- the positive attitudes, motivation and excellent behaviour of the pupils;
- the quality of the teaching, most of which is good or better;
- the very good standards of attainment at GCSE;
- the commitment of the staff to the life and work of the school;

- the very good arrangements for pastoral care including the comprehensive programme for year 8 induction; and
- the very good support provided by the LSC for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- establish a more effective process for school development planning and improvement which is underpinned by effective and considerate consultation and communication with staff, parents, pupils and governors in line with the statutory guidance provided by the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order; and
- ensure the continued professional development of senior and middle managers in order that they have the necessary skills to lead, manage, monitor and evaluate the implementation of their responsibilities throughout the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

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

### **English**

The main strengths are:

- the quality of teaching which was, in the main, good or better;
- the responsive and well behaved pupils;
- the good working relationships between teachers and pupils;
- the very good standards of attainment at GCSE; and
- the stimulating and vibrant Library Resource Centre and the commitment of the librarian to providing a high quality whole-school resource that supports reading effectively.

The main area for improvement is:

- to improve the quality of leadership and management in the department.

### **Mathematics**

The main strengths are:

- the very good relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the pupils' excellent behaviour and application to their work;
- the commitment and hard-work of the acting head of department and the teachers of mathematics;
- the good teaching in one quarter of the lessons and the very good teaching in half of the lessons observed; and
- the very good standards achieved by most of the pupils and the policy of entering all pupils for GCSE mathematics.

The main area for improvement is:

- the further development of the maths team, in the areas of monitoring, evaluating and sharing of good practice, with a particular focus on teaching and learning.

### **Art and Design**

The main strengths are:

- the very good relationships between the teachers and pupils;



- the commitment of the teachers and the encouraging climate for learning which they facilitate;
- the collegiality within the art department; the teachers and the Head of Department are mutually supportive and demonstrate flexibility in maximising the benefit to pupils of their individual specialist expertise;
- the consistently good quality of the teaching;
- the results in public examinations; and
- the strong emphasis placed on the development of the creative application of a good range of media and processes, in particular on the development of the pupils' recording skills.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the establishment of formal, systematic arrangements to support and inform department development planning; and
- to develop further the use of ICT in teaching and learning and to extend its use as a subject specific medium.

**vii. Date of Inspection: W/C 17.02.09**  
**viii. Area of Study: Standard Inspection**

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 8 Intake	178	173	156	149	165	162
Total Enrolment	1083	1034	1008	982	980	968

### 1.3 Attendance

### **1.4 Contact ratio and pupil teacher ratio**

- 0.66

- 15.1

2006/07	Year 12	NI%	Year13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	88		78	
Another School	3%	11.1	0%	2
Employment	14%	12.4	3%	19.5
Full-time Further Education	48%	37.2	9%	21
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	87%	42
Full-time Training	26%	30.1	1%	6.6
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	9%	4.1	0%	4.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	4.9	0%	4.6

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Cookstown High School

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects</b>	100	95	91
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</b>	61.34	64.78	64.04
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and mathematics</b>	45.36	56.6	57.3
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects</b>	77.32	83.02	71.35
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels</b>	73.33	63.01	59.02
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels</b>	91.67	89.04	96.72

## APPENDIX 3

### EXAMINATION RESULTS

**Table 1** showing GCSE subject results, over the three years ending in June 2008, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

	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	Art and Design Business Studies English English Literature French Geography German* History Home Economics Information Technology Mathematics Mathematics Additional Music Office Technology* Sport / PE Studies		Biology Chinese* Physics Science Double Award 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject	Chemistry	Science Single Award
GCE A-C	D&T: Product Design German* Information Technology	Business Studies Chemistry History Sport / PE Studies	Art and Design Biology French* Mathematics Physics	Geography Mathematics Further*	English Literature Home Economics Music*

\*less than 30 candidates over last 3 years.

**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	Chinese	Biology	Chemistry Information Technology Mathematics Additional Music Physics	Art & Design English Literature Science Double Award 1st Subject	Business Studies English French Geography German History Home Economics Mathematics Office Technology Science Single Award Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	Biology Chinese English Literature Physics	Art & Design Chemistry English German History Home Economics Information Technology Mathematics Additional Music Office Technology Science Double Award 1st Subject Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies French Geography Mathematics Science Single Award		

GCE A-C		Art and Design Business Studies English Literature French Geography German History Italian Mathematics Mathematics Further Music	Biology Chemistry Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport / PE Studies	D&T: Product Design	
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**Table 3** showing results for Occupational Studies in 2007 and 2008

<b>2007</b>	<b>Double Award Level 1</b>	<b>Double Award Level 2</b>
Pupils entered (30)	21	9
percentage	70%	30%
<b>2008</b>	<b>Double Award Level 1</b>	<b>Double Award Level 2</b>
Pupils entered (25)	12	8
percentage	48%	32%

**Table 4** showing results for Key Skills Communication 2007 and 2008

<b>2007</b>	<b>Achieving level 1</b>	<b>Achieving level 2</b>
Pupils entered (30)	21	6
percentage	70%	20%
<b>2008</b>	<b>Achieving level 1</b>	<b>Achieving level 2</b>
Pupils entered (25)	19	2
percentage	76%	8%

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