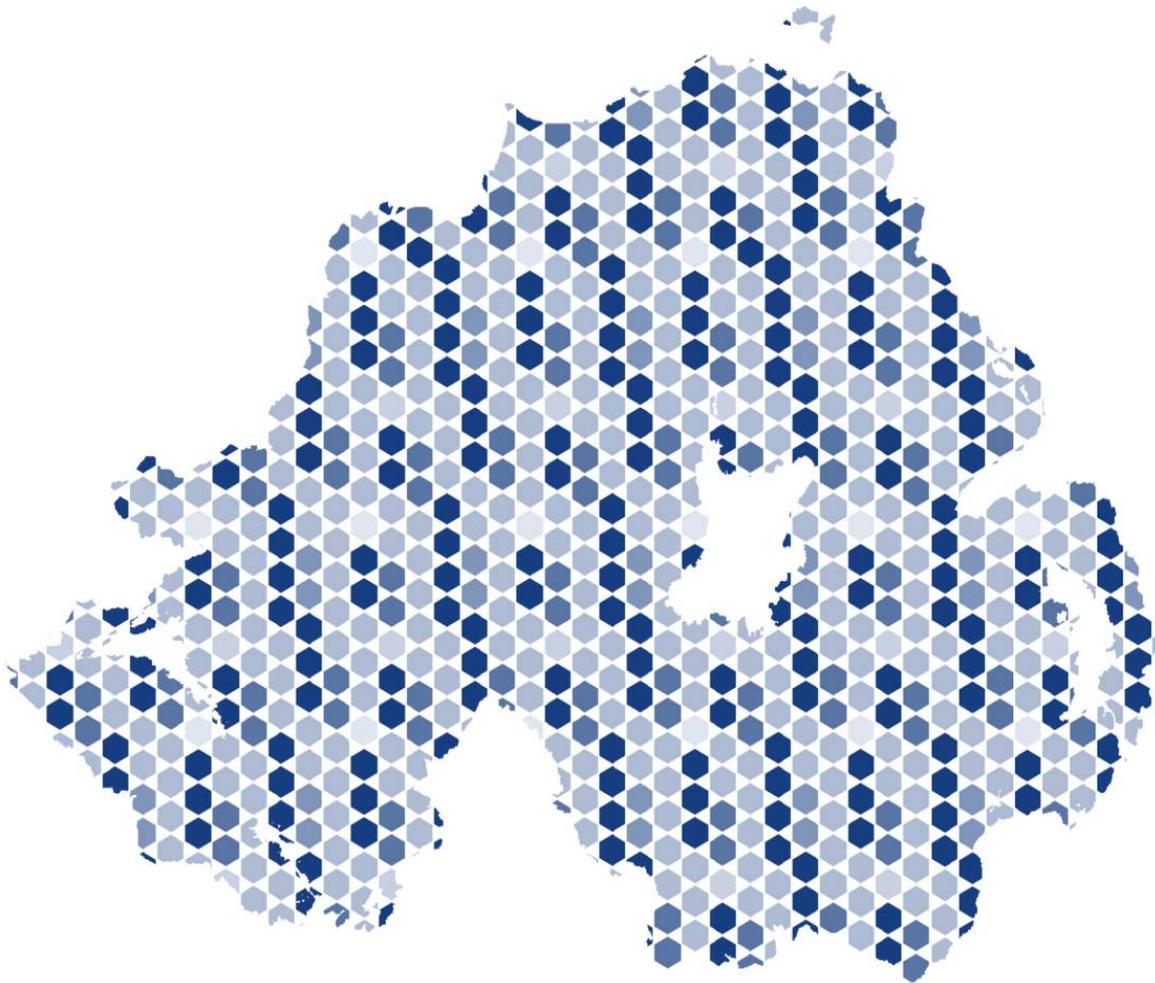


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Holy Cross College, Strabane

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2009

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT

Holy Cross College is an 11-18, co-educational, bilateral school. It was founded in 2005 as a result of the amalgamation of Our Lady of Mercy High School, St Colman's High School and the Convent Grammar School. It is situated on the southern periphery of Strabane on a large 30 acre site. The school draws its pupils from the Strabane and the greater Strabane area. There has been some variation in the enrolment to the new school although this has stabilised over the last two years. Over the past five years, one-fifth of the intake received grades A or B in the Transfer Procedure. Approximately one-third of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 23% of the pupils in years 8-12 as requiring additional support with their learning.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English, history and mathematics. The provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and the arrangements for the inclusion of these pupils in all aspects of school life was also inspected. The provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were evaluated, as was the approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, lessons were observed across a range of other subjects.

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

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching staff and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. In addition, meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Two hundred and eighty questionnaires were issued to parents; 70 (25%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 32 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires and most of the comments from the parents indicated high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. In particular, they mentioned the dedication of the teachers and leaders, the benefits of the bilateral arrangements and the new school building. The few issues raised by the parents were reported to the Principal and the governors.

Sixty-nine teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with nine providing additional written comments. Sixteen support staff also completed questionnaires and two of them provided additional written comments. The staff appreciated the support of the senior management team throughout the amalgamation process, working relationships within the school, and the good links with the local community. A minority of the staff, however, reported that inappropriate behaviour by some pupils is not being addressed consistently or effectively. A minority also reported that communication within the school needs to be more effective. The pupils reported that they enjoy and feel safe in school; they know to whom to turn in the event of any concern. A small number of pupils expressed concerns about the quality of the careers advice they have received.

The governors expressed their strong support for, and commitment to, the work of the school. They appreciate the great efforts of the teachers and leaders during the amalgamation.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK**

### **2.1 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS**

The pupils are generally well-motivated. When given the opportunity, in a minority of the lessons observed, the pupils demonstrate high levels of thinking skills, they are confident, articulate, engage well in their learning and work effectively with others.

The school has identified the need to address the clear drop in standards over the last three years, evident across General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C is below the average for non-selective schools with similar levels of free school meals, although the corresponding figure including English and mathematics is well above the similar non-selective average. A majority of pupils with special educational needs achieve GCSE accreditation in a range of subjects and a number have experienced notable success. A minority of such pupils, however, achieve inadequate standards in literacy and numeracy. While almost all pupils achieved at least grade E at GCE A level, in 2009 well under half of the pupils achieved at least grade C in three subjects. There is wide variation in the standards achieved in individual subjects at both GCSE and GCE A level. It is appropriate that the school has begun to monitor more closely the standards achieved in examinations and it will be important for subject departments to use this analysis to identify specific action plans to facilitate improvement. More details about the examination results are given in Appendices 2 and 3.

There is an appropriate GCSE entry policy for the more able pupils although the entry policy for less able pupils needs to be reconsidered. This review should be included in the appropriate planned consideration of broadening the curriculum at key stage (KS) 4 and at post-16. In recent years, several vocational options have been successfully introduced into the post-16 curriculum including useful links with local colleges of further and higher education as part of the Derg Mourne Learning Community. The school recognises that the current GCE A level curriculum is not sustainable and needs to be extensively reviewed.

### **2.2 THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **2.2.1 THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

One hundred and nineteen lessons were visited during the inspection. The quality of teaching was good or better in a majority of the lessons observed. The most effective lessons were characterised by good working relationships, careful planning, purposeful exposition of learning intentions, explicit building on previous learning, a good knowledge of the interests of the pupils, appropriate pace and challenge, active involvement of pupils, good questioning by the teachers, good application of the strategies of assessment for learning, and effective plenary sessions to consolidate learning. The quality of the teaching in a minority of lessons observed needs to improve: there was a lack of challenge, leading to poor behaviour; the teachers over-directed the learning; opportunities to promote collaborative learning were missed; expectations were low; cross-curricular references and links were inadequate; and the needs of all pupils were not met.

The Learning Support Team provides good leadership to guide the work of the school in catering for the vast range of learning, social, emotional and behavioural challenges presented by almost a quarter of the school population. A number of pupils with statements of special educational need are well-supported by the classroom assistants and are making good progress. In a significant minority of lessons, however, the work provided is not sufficiently matched to the wide range of abilities of the pupils. Whole-class teaching

approaches tend to dominate and many pupils would benefit from work tailored specifically to meet their requirements more effectively. Progress is slow for many pupils and there is little movement across the ability bands. It will be important for subject teachers to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all of the pupils.

Appropriately, the school has identified the need to promote literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and is currently planning a more coherent programme in all subjects and areas of learning, including a series of interventions to focus on raising standards and to provide additional support to those pupils at greatest risk.

More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

## 2.2.2 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. This is displayed through the pastoral support available within the school, including the chaplains, the mentoring system which provides peer support for the junior pupils and the development of the processes to consult with parents and pupils on pastoral issues. There is a need to monitor and evaluate the outworking of the behaviour management policy across the school to ensure that it is more consistently implemented.

## 2.2.3 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE. However, parents need to be informed of the procedures for reporting a concern; and the recently reviewed policies, need to be implemented to fulfil the requirements of the relevant DE circulars.

## 2.2.4 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives satisfactory attention to developing aspects of healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the opportunities for the pupils to participate in healthy cookery and a wide range of sporting activities. The school needs to extend the range of healthy eating programmes to encourage pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

## 2.2.5 INCLUSION

The school has a small number of pupils not yet proficient in English. The teacher in charge provides effective support and the pupils are well-settled and making appropriate progress in school.

## 2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The school has successfully come through a period of great upheaval and disruption during the establishment of Holy Cross College and the construction of the new school building when the management focus was on structural and organisational matters. It is appropriate that the school has identified the need for a renewed focus on the development of learning and teaching.

The Principal has been in post since January 2009. She is hard-working, fully committed to the work and life of the school, and to the welfare of the pupils and staff. The school has a complex management structure which needs to be reviewed to facilitate the intended priority of focusing more effectively on learning and teaching across the ability range. There is also a need for more strategic direction at senior and middle management levels.

The process of self-evaluation is at an early stage of development at all levels in the school. The school development plan complies fully with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations Northern Ireland (NI) 2005 Order and identifies appropriate priorities for improvement, most of which are reflected in the inspection findings. There is a need now to extend the action planning process to focus more clearly on achievable and time-bound targets at all levels. In addition, effective processes to monitor and evaluate provision need to be established in order to inform more fully the school development planning process and to raise standards.

The Board of Governors is committed to the work of the school. The governors give generously of their time, exercise their challenge function supportively and are well-informed about the work of the school.

### **3. MAIN FINDINGS**

The main strengths of the school include:

- the good progress made through the amalgamation and the transfer to the new school building;
- the very good quality of the learning environment;
- the good quality of pastoral care;
- the generally well-behaved and co-operative pupils;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in a majority of the lessons observed, and in particular in history, where half of the lessons observed were very good or outstanding; and
- the commitment of the governors to the work of the school.

The areas for improvement, most of which have already been identified by the school, include the need to develop a more strategic approach to:

- raising the standards achieved by pupils of all abilities;
- providing a more consistently high quality of learning and teaching, particularly for those pupils identified as having special educational needs, through the effective dissemination of the very good practice evident during the inspection; and
- leadership and management at all levels, through a more effective focus on self-evaluation and associated action planning to promote improvement.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement in standards, in learning and teaching, and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the pupils are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE SUBJECT AREAS UNDER FOCUS

### English

The quality of provision in English is good.

The strengths include:

- the quality of the teaching , the majority of which was good or better;
- the good start made to implementing the Northern Ireland Curriculum, particularly in relation to the new schemes of work;
- the department's self-evaluation which identifies appropriate areas for development;
- the good leadership within the department; and
- the provision of online resources for staff and pupils especially at GCSE and the development of a Virtual Learning Environment for GCE A level.

An area for improvement is the need:

- to focus more strategically on improving the standards achieved by all pupils in external examinations.

### History

The quality of provision in history is good.

The strengths include:

- the positive working relationships at all levels;
- the motivated and interested pupils;
- the reflective, committed and hard-working teachers;
- the very good range of active learning strategies used at KS3 to develop the pupils' thinking skills and personal capabilities;
- the quality of the teaching observed, half of which was very good or outstanding; and
- the effective leadership of, and collegial approach to, work within the department.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to meet more effectively the needs of all the pupils by providing a better balance between support and challenge in all lessons; and

- to raise the standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations as identified by the department.

## **Mathematics**

The quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

The strengths include:

- the good levels of individual support provided for the pupils in most of the lessons observed;
- the start made to the collaborative writing and reviewing of the KS3 scheme of work;
- the ongoing development of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the teaching and learning of mathematics;
- the start made to evaluating aspects of the year 8 provision for mathematics; and
- the hard-working teachers who prepare well for lessons.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the quality of the teaching, through, for example, using effective questioning strategies and engaging the pupils more actively in their learning;
- to develop self-evaluation to promote improvement; and
- to raise standards, particularly at GCSE, through, for example, ensuring appropriate progression and that the work is matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Holy Cross College, Strabane      v. Date of Inspection: W/C 16/11/09  
 ii. School Reference Number: 223-0301      vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Maintained

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 8 Intake	208	208	198	272	259
Total enrolment	1477	1400	1369	1390	1390

1.3 Attendance

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2008/09	NI Average 2007/08
% Attendance	92.2	88.2	88.3	86.3	86.5	92.8	90	89	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 89.3      iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.71
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.7

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	129	131	115	95	120	39	50	679
Enrolment: Girls	130	137	92	117	104	65	66	711
Enrolment: Total	259	268	207	212	224	104	116	1390
PTR								

- 1.5 Staying On Rate (2007/08) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	54.3	NI Av Year 13	40.9
Year 14	45.3	NI Av Year 14	N/A

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	132		134	
Another School	0%	11.3	1%	1.7
Employment	9%	8.7	6%	18.6
Full-time Further Education	2%	41.8	15%	22.4
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	69%	42.8
Full-time Training	86%	30.3	4%	4.9
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	2%	4.4	5%	5.6
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	2%	3.5	1%	4

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Holy Cross College, Strabane

SCHOOL YEAR: 2009/2010

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	96.15	95.2	97.66
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	54.27	50.4	48.6
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	44.87	38.8	28.97
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	82.5	74.8	76.17
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	67.96	58.12	44.95
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	98.06	96.58	98.17

## EXAMINATION RESULTS

*Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2009, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages*

*Table 1*

	<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*-C	Art & Design Drama Geography GNVQ Media Studies Journalism* Home Economics Irish Religious Studies Spanish	Information technology	Additional Mathematics Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject English English Literature Mathematics Music	History Single Award Science	Business Studies Design and Technology French Media Film and TV Studies* Motor Vehicle Studies Business and Communication Systems* Sport/PE Studies
GCE A level A-C	Computer Studies/ Computing** French** History of Art and Design** Physics**	Art and Design Media Film and TV Studies Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies Chemistry** Drama** English Literature Geography Home Economics Mathematics	Biology History Music** Politics	Design and Technology** Irish** Religious Studies Spanish**

\* Denotes subjects with less than 30 pupils over three years.

\*\* Denotes subjects with less than 20 pupils over three years.

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

**Table 2**

	<b>100%-96%</b>	<b>95%-86%</b>	<b>85%-76%</b>	<b>75%-66%</b>	<b>65%-0%</b>
GCSE A*-C			Additional Mathematics Art & Design Drama Information Technology Music	Double Award Science English Literature GNVQ Media Studies Irish	Business Studies Design & Technology English French Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Media, Film & TV Studies Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies Single Award Science Spanish Sport/ PE Studies
GCE A level A-C		Art & Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography History Irish Mathematics Media, Film & TV Studies Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Design & Technology History of Art & Design Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport/ PE Studies		Computer Studies

<b>BTEC National Awards</b>				
<b>2008</b>	<b>Distinction</b>	<b>Merit</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Total Students</b>
Child Care Early Years	10	-	2	12
<b>2009</b>				
Child Care Early Years	2	-	-	2
Engineering	3	1	-	4
	<b>Distinction</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Part Award</b>	
Construction	2	1	1	4

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