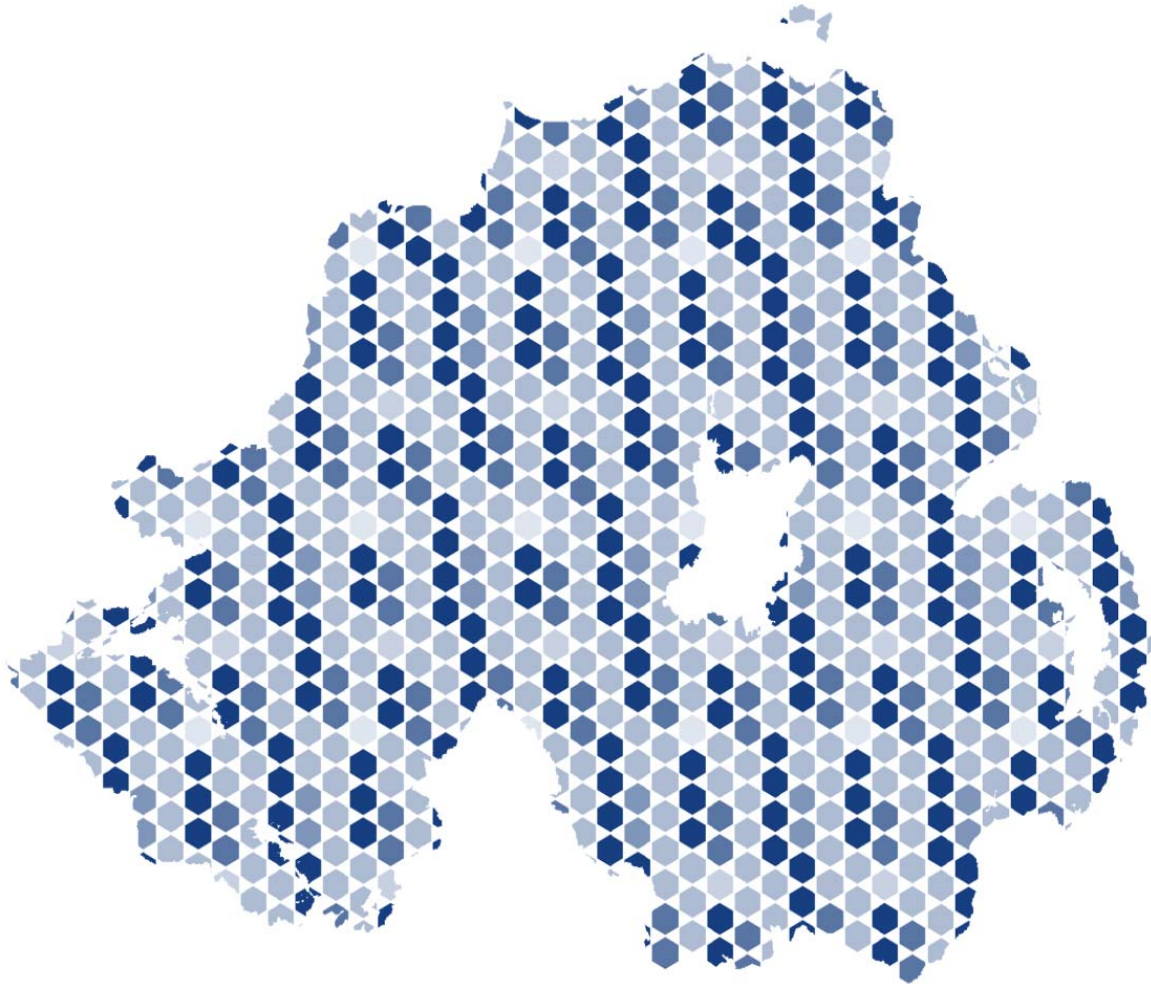


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Larne Grammar School

Report of an Inspection  
in April 2010

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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, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT

Larne Grammar School is a co-educational, voluntary grammar school. It is situated on an elevated site at the edge of the town. The pupils are drawn from the town and the wider rural areas within an approximate ten mile radius. The enrolment has remained stable in recent years and stands currently at 722. Over the previous five years, approximately 50% of the pupils entering year 8 achieved a grade A and 25% achieved grade B in the Transfer Procedure. The proportion of pupils with grade A is lower than most selective schools. The school has identified around 7.5% of the pupils who require additional support in their learning; 4.5% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals.

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

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support 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 fifty questionnaires issued to parents; 48% were completed with 30 returns containing written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and the majority of the comments from the parents demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the work and life of the school. In particular, the parents praised the arrangements for pastoral care, the supportive staff and the successes of the pupils in public examinations.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school and emphasised their appreciation of the commitment and dedication of the Principal and the staff. They highlighted the high esteem in which the school is held in the local community and the fact that so many families send successive generations of pupils to the school. They spoke highly of the examination results produced by the pupils and the role the pupils play in the life of the local community.

Three-quarters of the teachers and almost all the support staff completed confidential questionnaires with 32 providing written comments. The majority of the staff commented favourably on the well-equipped school, the mutual respect between the teachers and the pupils, who are positive and responsive, the good opportunities the pupils have to develop academically and the range of extra-curricular activities.

However, a majority of teachers who responded raised issues in relation to the ineffective communication across the staff at all levels and between management and the teachers, their sense of being undervalued by the senior staff and by the Principal and their perceived lack of involvement in identifying and achieving the school's priorities. In addition, these teachers highlighted concerns about staff welfare and the effectiveness of leadership within the school.

In discussions held with the pupils, they talked enthusiastically about the support provided by their teachers. The pupils reported that they feel safe in the school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the concerns emerging from the staff questionnaires and comments. These are dealt with in the body of the report.

### 1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on learning and teaching, and leadership and management at all levels and, in addition, on the provision for English, mathematics and music. The school's provision for pastoral care, careers education and learning support, and the arrangements for child protection, were also evaluated, as well as the school's approach towards promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in a wide range of other subjects.

## 2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

### 2.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The pupils' behaviour is excellent. When given the opportunity, they communicate confidently and fluently; they are articulate, highly motivated, co-operate well with one another and show insightful understanding of their work. They take pride in their performance and, in general, the presentation of their work is very good.

The pupils' achievement in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) at grades A\*-C in at least seven subjects including English and mathematics has increased over the previous three years, and in the last two years is above the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. Over the previous three years, there is variation in the GCSE results at grades A\*-B; a significant minority of subjects are more than five percentage points above the respective NI average while a similar proportion of subjects are more than five percentage points below the NI average.

The pupils achieve variable standards at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level. Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A Level grades at A-C has ranged from well below to below (in 2009) the NI average for similar selective schools and, over this time, approximately one-third of the pupils did not achieve this level. Over the previous three years, most subjects are within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average at GCE A-C.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in appendices 3 and 4.

The school has begun to broaden the curriculum offered to the pupils although limited progress has been made to provide an appropriate, sufficiently balanced and diverse curriculum to meet the changing needs of the individual pupils and to promote a wider range of career pathways.

### 2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of the teaching ranged from very good to inadequate; almost one-half of the lessons were good and a further one-quarter very good. However, approximately one-quarter of the lessons had areas for improvement. The teachers are conscientious, hard-working and fully committed to the academic progress of the pupils.

In the best practice observed, there was a very good rapport between the teachers and the pupils, the pupils engaged in effective self- and peer-evaluation which informed future planning of their work and the teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge which promoted genuine interest and enthusiasm from the pupils. The lessons were characterised by very good use of ICT to motivate the pupils and stimulate oral work. For example, sustained and incidental use of the target language by the teachers is a strong feature of

modern languages lessons and the pupils responded using several phrases. Effective group and paired work enhanced the learning and the pupils responded well to praise, encouragement and positive feedback.

In the less effective practice, the teachers used a narrow range of teaching approaches and there was a clear lack of engagement with the pupils. Lessons were over-directed and the pupils remained passive. The teachers used closed questions with limited opportunities for the pupils to provide extended answers or share their ideas. The teachers did not always take into account the prior learning of the pupils. Intended learning outcomes were not well developed and plenary sessions to consolidate learning were ineffective.

Management needs to facilitate an effective whole-school forum for the sharing of good practice in learning and teaching, including the further development of ICT and on-line methodologies.

The subject departments have made good progress in planning for appropriate elements of the revised curriculum at key stage 3 (KS 3). In general, the teachers assess the pupils' work regularly, thoroughly and supportively. In several departments, the teachers make good use of mini-white boards to identify and monitor the pupils' understanding of their work. In general, the teachers need to provide more consistent and effective feedback in order to ensure that comments made on pupils' written work have a stronger focus on bringing about improvement.

### 2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. The key features of the pastoral care include: the very good behaviour displayed by the pupils both in and out of the classroom; the good individual support systems in place for pupils experiencing personal difficulties; the effective contribution of the year 13 pupils to the mentoring scheme and the participation of the pupils in the school council; the very good pastoral leadership and management provided by the heads of year and class tutors; and the commitment and dedication of the Vice-principal in charge of pastoral care. The mentoring scheme has completed a two year cycle and needs to be further evaluated by parents, teachers and pupils, to develop the programme further. The morning registration time is not used to promote effectively the pupils' pastoral education and should be reviewed.

### 2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

### 2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the whole-school involvement with the annual Health Promotion Week and the *Healthfast Telegraph*. The area for improvement is the need to continue these positive steps taken to encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyles among pupils throughout the year.

### 2.6 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION

The special education needs co-ordinator has developed useful guidance for the small number of pupils with special educational needs. Suitable individual education plans have been devised to support the pupils in withdrawal sessions. There is a need to share this

planning with the teachers more fully and to link it to the work in other subjects. The school has appreciable data about the pupils' abilities; there is scope to use this information to provide a learning programme better suited to the identified needs of the pupils.

## 2.7 CAREERS

The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is satisfactory. The pupils are articulate and confident, and most demonstrate a good knowledge of career pathways. The careers staff are hardworking and have identified appropriate areas for the development of careers education through their self-evaluative processes. In general, they have limited time to carry out their duties and further staff development is needed. There is a lack of coherence in the pupils' experience of careers in KS4. The senior management team (SMT) needs to ensure that the provision for careers is more fully integrated across all the curricular areas of the school in order to meet better the future education, training and employment needs of all of the pupils.

## 3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Overall there is inadequate strategic leadership of the school. The Principal is in his ninth year in the school and he is supported in his work by the governors. He has promoted and enhanced the standing of the school in the local community and established links with the local primary schools. He knows the pupils well and contributes significant time and effort to supporting extra-curricular and other activities.

The roles and responsibilities of the SMT need to be reviewed and expanded to encompass more effectively whole-school issues related to learning and improvement in order to meet the identified and agreed needs of the school.

The school development plan (SDP) does not meet fully the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The consultation process with key stakeholders to prepare the plan has been insufficient and there is no clear focus on improvement. It contains a number of appropriate priority areas for development drawn up by the SMT to be advanced by a series of working groups. A baseline position has been established and action plans have been drawn up. However, in the few meetings dedicated to taking forward important whole-school issues, progress to date has been slow and the outcomes are not sufficiently monitored. The school's approach to self-evaluation is at an early stage of development. In general, the departments do not identify specific enough strategies to bring about improvement against set targets which are monitored appropriately.

Subject departments have produced useful action plans which have identified suitable priorities for improvement many of which are confirmed by the findings of the inspection. Clearer linkages are needed between the SDP, the individual subject development plans and the objectives for Professional Review and Staff Development. In addition, the lateral links across the working groups need to be strengthened.

The lack of effective communication, involvement and inclusion of staff in whole-school issues has led to poor working relationships and a divided workforce. More cohesion and effective team working is essential in order to realise the full capability and capacity of all of the staff and to promote the best standards from the pupils.

The Principal, senior management, governors and all of the teachers need to work more collegiately and co-operatively in order to achieve the appropriate, stated school aims of providing the best education for the pupils in keeping with the values of mutual respect, open communication and positive working relationships.

While there are issues on all sides, there is an onus on the governors and the Principal to take the concerns of the staff more seriously and to deal with important matters more effectively.

Initiated by the Principal and the governors, all staff need to commit to promoting better working relationships, building trust, improving communication and increasing involvement in the interest of the learners if this school is to move forward.

The school premises are bright, well-maintained and well-resourced.

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

The main strengths of the school include:

- the hard-working and committed staff;
- the well-behaved pupils who willingly engage in their learning;
- the quality of the teaching observed, which was good in almost one-half of the lessons and very good in a further one-quarter;
- the standards achieved by the pupils, particularly at GCSE;
- the good progress made in reviewing the planning to reflect the curriculum at KS3; and
- the good pastoral care of the pupils.

The areas for improvement are the need to improve the leadership by:

- providing sharper strategic direction to whole-school development issues and developing a culture of self-evaluation at all levels; in particular, to build and support the capacity of middle management to promote school improvement;
- developing better (two-way) communication between staff and senior management based on mutual respect and meaningful consultation to achieve better working relationships in the interests of the pupils and the welfare of the whole-school community.

#### **5. 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 areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and significant areas for improvement in leadership and management at all levels, 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.



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

**English**

The quality of the provision for English is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards, including the achievements of pupils in English and English Literature at GCSE and GCE A level;
- the quality of the teaching observed, just under half of which was good and over a quarter of which was very good;
- the positive working relationships and good rapport between the teachers and pupils in all of the lessons observed;
- the pupils' motivation and ability to work well collaboratively in a range of contexts; and
- the provision for reading, including the very appealing and proactive school library.

The area for improvement is:

- to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department, in order to bring about better planning and to quality assure the provision more effectively.

**Mathematics**

The quality of the provision for mathematics is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards attained by the pupils in GCSE Additional and GCE A level mathematics;
- the motivated pupils who engage well in their learning and their ability to work independently;
- the good to very good teaching in a majority of the lessons observed during the inspection;
- the good progress in reviewing schemes of work at KS3, particularly in developing a range of active learning activities; and
- the commitment of the department to development work supported through action planning.

The areas for improvement are:

- to develop target-setting for individual pupils in order to raise standards, particularly in GCSE mathematics; and
- to develop a culture of self-evaluation linked closely to action to promote improvement.

## **Music**

The quality of the provision for music is satisfactory.

The strengths of the work include:

- the engagement of the pupils in practical music making activities;
- most of the teaching which was good or very good;
- the good use of self- and peer-evaluation to inform future learning;
- the improving results at GCSE;
- the good use of ICT to support and enhance the learning; and
- the opportunities for pupils to develop their musical skills through extra-curricular activities.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- to monitor and evaluate more rigorously the standards achieved by the pupils in order to inform future planning and classroom practice across the department; and
- to ensure that departmental action planning focuses clearly on the quality of teaching and learning and improving standards.

## APPENDIX 2

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The main road separating the playing fields and the technology department is a potential hazard to the safety of the pupils.
- The back entrance gates are permanently padlocked and comprise a potential obstruction if evacuation of the premises is required.



1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: LARNE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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	100	99.1	98.17
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	98.2	96.4	96.33
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	93.69	93.69	93.58
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	93.69	92.79	93.58
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics	90.09	91.89	92.66
<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	61.9	58.21	71.91
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	92.86	91.04	94.38

## 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

	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*-B	Business Studies Design and Technology English Literature Science Double Award 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject	Art & Design English Information Technology	Geography Home Economics Mathematics Additional	French History Mathematics Spanish Sport/PE Studies	Music* Religious Studies
GCE A Level A-C	French** Information Technology Music** Performing Arts** Spanish**	Art & Design** Biology Business Studies Design and Technology: Product Design English Literature	Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Psychology Religious Studies** Sport/PE Studies	Computer Studies/ Computing	Chemistry Physics

\* Denotes subject with total entry of less than 30 over 3 years.

\*\* Denotes subjects with total entry of less than 20 over 3 years.

**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*-B		Information Technology Music	Art & Design English English Literature History Home Economics Mathematics Additional Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Design and Technology Geography Mathematics Spanish	Business Studies French Science Double Award 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject
GCE A Level A-C		Art & Design Business Studies English Literature French Geography German History Mathematics Music Performing Arts Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Home Economics Information Technology Physics	Computer Studies/ Computing Design and Technology: Product Design Sport/PE Studies	Psychology

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