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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



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

St Columban's High School
Kilkeel

Inspected: January 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Columban's High School is a maintained, co-educational school providing education for 11-16 year old pupils. The enrolment has declined steadily over recent years. The pupils are drawn from the town of Kilkeel and the surrounding rural area. Twenty-seven percent of pupils are entitled to free school meals and almost 18% of pupils require additional support with their learning. Just over 60% of the pupils entering year 8 in 2008 did not participate in the Transfer Procedure with the remainder (39%) receiving grades C or D. The Principal has been in post since 2005, in the first year as acting-Principal. At the time of the inspection the head of the geography department was absent. More detailed statistical information about the school is provided in Appendix 3.

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. In addition to meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), groups of pupils from years 8 and 12 were interviewed. One hundred and thirty nine questionnaires were issued to the parents, 22% were returned to the Department of Education and 11 contained additional written comments. A majority of the responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were highly supportive of the work of the school. In particular, the parents 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 (SEN).

Over half of the teachers and eleven support staff completed a confidential questionnaire, with two providing additional written comments. The responses were almost entirely positive, citing, in particular, the high value placed by the Principal and management team on the work of the staff and the priority they afford to the care and welfare of the pupils.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the few issues of concern emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff questionnaires. The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal's leadership, in particular his commitment to raising staff morale and school improvement. In addition, they highlighted the exceptional hard work and dedication of the staff, most of whom hold additional roles of responsibility.

In discussions, the pupils talked positively about the strong sense of community within the school and of the approachable and helpful teachers. They indicated that they know whom to turn to if they have concerns about their work, personal safety or 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 geography, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and the arrangements for the inclusion of these pupils in all aspects of school life. The school's

provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also evaluated, as was the school's approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As additional evidence for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in all 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

The pupils are generally motivated to do well in their work. Most of the pupils in Year 12 are entered for five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. Over the last three years there has been an improving trend in the results obtained by the pupils at GCSE grades A* to C. In 2008, 42% of the year 12 pupils achieved grades A* to C in five or more subjects which is just below the average for non-selective schools. The number of pupils receiving grades A* to C including English and mathematics in 2008, is equivalent to the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar non-selective schools.

The choice of subjects on offer at GCSE level is, however, narrow and the school needs to broaden the range of externally accredited courses available at Key Stage 4 to meet better the needs of the changing profile of its pupils.

More details of the examination results can be found in Appendix 4.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Of the 44 lessons observed, almost all of the teaching was satisfactory or better, with almost two-thirds being good or better. In the most effective practice, the lessons are well-organised, stimulating and appropriately contextualised to the pupils' experience. The teachers make explicit the learning intentions, take account of the varying abilities and interests within the class, and employ effective teaching strategies including the use of individual, paired and group work to engage and motivate the pupils. In a small number of the lessons, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is used effectively by the teacher to support the lesson and to motivate the pupils to learn.

Where the teaching is less effective in over a third of the lessons, the teaching and learning activities are over directed by the teacher, there is a lack of pace to the lesson and insufficient challenge for the pupils, a predominance of closed questioning and limited opportunities for the pupils to develop as independent learners.

Due to a multiplicity of external factors including falling enrolment, and financial constraints, most of the teachers are required to teach at least one additional subject outside their subject specialism. This places considerable demands on them in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation and overall workload.

2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the pastoral care within the school is satisfactory. The strengths include the caring and inclusive ethos, the commitment of the staff to the welfare of the pupils and the links with other agencies to broaden the support for the pupils. The school needs to integrate

further the academic and pastoral aspects of the curriculum through a more systematic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the pastoral provision, including the taught pastoral programme in order to enhance the personal and social development of the pupils.

2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives satisfactory attention to developing aspects of healthy eating and physical activity, for example healthy food provision in the canteen and the closure of the school tuck shop. The areas for improvement identified include the need to describe the whole-school healthy eating programmes in a Food in School Policy and establish monitoring and evaluation procedures as the school continues to develop healthy eating programmes.

2.6 SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS/INCLUSION

The teacher with responsibility for the management of the Learning Support Centre (LSC) ensures that the pupils with special educational needs receive good quality learning experiences as they progress through the school. The pupils are taught English and mathematics by the LSC teacher and are effectively integrated into the main school for all other subjects. The teacher plans meticulously and evaluates the pupils' progress well, based on a thorough assessment of their needs. The pupils within mainstream classes, including pupils who have English as a second language, receive good quality support in literacy and numeracy through effective withdrawal provision. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), who has been in post for just over one year, has appropriately prioritised the review of policy and provision across the school, and involved colleagues in revisiting the role of the SENCO and the purpose and format of individual education plans. As indicated by the school's self-evaluation, it is important to plan further work to support the staff's professional development in understanding SEN, and to ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the experiences of the pupils with special educational needs throughout the school, in particular, the sharing of good practice.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Since taking up post, the Principal and management team have made good progress in a number of key areas of school improvement; the building of staff morale, increasing the level of collegiality among the staff and improving results in external examinations, all of which are underpinned by the clear progress made in the school development planning process. To maintain the momentum of these developments there is an urgent need to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the management team, in particular those of the Vice-principal, to develop the role of the middle management tier and to establish clear systematic lines of communication and accountability throughout the school.

The staff have made a good start to using the self-evaluation of their work, including the analysis of quantitative data, to inform target setting in almost all subjects. However, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation in almost all of the areas inspected, including aspects of whole school responsibility such as pastoral care and curriculum planning. To maintain the momentum of these developments there is an urgent need to define clearly the roles and

responsibilities of the management team. The school's process for improvement is linked to development planning and there is a clear commitment to action planning. The school is working to meet more fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the recent improvement in the external examination results;
- the Principal's commitment to raising standards in all aspects of the life and work of the school;
- the progress made in establishing an effective school development planning process;
- the teaching, of which almost all was satisfactory or better, with two-thirds being good or better;
- the good working relations between teaching and non-teaching staff in supporting the pupils; and
- the commitment of the teachers to supporting the needs of the pupils.

4.1 The areas for improvement are:

- to review and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the senior and middle management tiers to develop further their effectiveness and accountability;
- to improve leadership and management at all levels in order to improve the management of the curriculum, the quality of the provision and the standards achieved by the pupils; and
- to establish rigorous, systematic monitoring and evaluation procedures across the school.

5. CONCLUSION

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this organisation 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 organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

It will be important that the employing authority, governors and the Principal and management team, manage issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

APPENDIX 1

Mathematics

The main strengths of the mathematics department include:

- the on-going evaluation and review of the schemes of work;
- the use of performance data to aid target setting and the analysis of the pupils' progression;
- the range of teaching strategies, including paired and group work and the use of relevant and interesting contexts;
- the use of ICT to enhance the quality of teaching and the engagement of the pupils; and
- the use of monthly problems and national competitions to promote an interest in mathematics.

The main area for improvement is to:

- develop more effectively monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning, including that of the strategies for formative assessment.

English

The main strengths of the English Department include:

- the hard working and dedicated teachers;
- the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the effective use made of classroom assistants to support the learning; and
- the good start made to year 8 and year 9 planning for the NI Curriculum.

The main areas for improvement are to:

- develop a more strategic approach to monitoring and evaluating and disseminating the most effective work of the department in order to raise standards; and
- adopt a more rigorous approach to marking for improvement across all year groups.

Geography

The main strengths of the geography department include:

- the quality of planning for lessons and sharing of resources to promote consistency and progression in learning and teaching across the department;
- the well structured lessons with opportunities for the pupils to be involved in their learning;
- the use of a range of teaching strategies, supported well by ICT, which are used to engage pupils effectively in their learning;
- the responsiveness of the majority of the pupils in class; and
- the hard work and commitment of the teachers and the good working relationships.

The area for development is:

- to monitor and evaluate the standards achieved by the pupils across the Department to inform future planning, learning and teaching and in promoting examination success at GCSE.

APPENDIX 2

Accommodation and Resources

- the lack of technician support in Technology and Design, Home Economics and Art and Design which puts additional demands on the teachers overall work load;
- the poor state of the accommodation does not support or promote high quality teaching and learning.

APPENDIX 3

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Columban's High v. Date of Inspection: W/C 19.01.09
 ii. School Reference Number: 523-0059 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-16
 iv. Status: Roman Catholic Maintained

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 8 Intake	59	58	55	48	60	51
Total enrolment	379	355	336	297	277	269

1.3 Attendance

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2007/08	NI Average 2006/07
% Attendance	90.1	89	88	84	87	0	0	88	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 20.4 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 77.8
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 13.2 Number of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused only) 0

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	33	36	31	30	30	0	0	160
Enrolment: Girls	18	22	20	20	29	0	0	109
Enrolment: Total	51	58	51	50	59	0	0	269
PTR	12.693	14.436	12.508	13.44	14.16	0	0	

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

Year 13	-	NI Av Year 13	N/A
Year 14	-	NI Av Year 14	N/A

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2006/07	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	83		0	
Another School	20%	11.1	N/A	N/A
Employment	22%	12.4	N/A	N/A
Full-time Further Education	6%	37.2	N/A	N/A
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Full-time Training	51%	30.1	N/A	N/A
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	1%	4.1	N/A	N/A
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	4.9	N/A	N/A

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Columban's High School

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

GCSE	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	71.05	86.30	85.00
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	31.58	28.77	41.67
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	26.32	12.33	30.00
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	53.95	60.27	75.00
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	53.95	60.27	30.00

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2008, 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	Information Technology	Science Double Award 1 st Subject Sport/PE Studies	English Literature French History Polish Science Single Award	English	Art & Design Geography Home Economics Irish Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies
GCSE A*-E	French Information Technology Irish	Art & Design English Literature Geography History Polish Science Double Award 1 st Subject Science Single Award Sport/PE Studies	English Mathematics		Home Economics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies

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	Polish		Information Technology	Art & Design English Literature Science Double Award 1 st Subject	English French Geography History Home Economics Home Economics Child Devt Irish Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies Science Single Award Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	English Literature Polish	Art & Design English History Home Economics Home Economics Child Devt Information Technology Irish Science Double Award 1 st Subject Sport/PE Studies	French Geography Mathematics Religious Studies Science Single Award	Motor Vehicle Studies	

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