



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**St Columba's College
Portaferry**

Inspected: November 2007

CONTENTS

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Columba's College is situated in the town of Portaferry, in County Down. The pupils are drawn from the town and the wider County Down area; about half of the pupils travel to school by bus. The enrolment has decreased steadily over the past five years, falling from 301 in 2002/03 to the present figure of 271. The school reports that 17% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and 12% of the total enrolment require additional support with aspects of their learning. Over the past three years, approximately 25% of the intake obtained grades A, B or C in the Transfer Procedure.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for design and technology, physical education, and science. The provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also inspected, as was the school's general approach to promoting health and well-being. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, lessons were observed in a range of other subjects.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the governors and groups of pupils in years 8, 12 and the sixth form. Approximately 146 questionnaires were issued to parents; 46% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 22 contained additional written comments. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were supportive of the work of the school. For example, the parents referred to the highly committed and industrious teachers, the family atmosphere, the regular marking of the pupils' work and the high standards attained by the pupils. A very small number of parents in their written comments raised issues, such as the need for better careers education and lack of subject choice in the sixth form. These issues are dealt with in the body of the report.

The governors also expressed their strong support for the work of the school. In addition to the strengths mentioned above, the governors commented on the caring ethos and the high regard for the school in the local community. They also expressed concern about the future prospects for the school in light of the current enrolment trends and the introduction of the Entitlement Framework for pupils in the 14 to 19 age range. Almost all of the teachers completed confidential questionnaires, with seven providing additional written comments. The responses were very positive and provided evidence of a highly committed staff who enjoy their work in the school and feel valued by the management and the parents. A minority of teachers expressed concern about ways of dealing with inappropriate behaviour and the pupils' limited contribution to decision-making in the school.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

The staff show a strong commitment to the care and welfare of the pupils. Key pastoral care policies are implemented effectively and reviewed regularly. The pupils' personal and social skills are promoted well through the taught programme. The school's policy for child protection reflects the requirements of the relevant DE circulars. The pupils show a thorough awareness of the school's arrangements for child protection and, importantly, know whom to approach if they have any concerns.

1.5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has strengths, which include: the vending of healthy drinks; and an audit of health promoting provision involving teachers, parents and pupils. There is a developing commitment to encourage the pupils to eat healthily and be physically active. The areas for improvement identified include the need for:

- the Senior Management Team (SMT) and catering staff to develop healthy eating provision at breakfast, break and in vending facilities, in order to meet the standards for other food set out in the document, "New Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food in Schools", published by DE in September 2007; and
- the SMT to ensure that catering staff are made aware of any pupils with special diets so that no pupils feel excluded from school meals.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS

The pupils are interested in learning and are generally motivated to do well in their work. In 2007, 52% of the year 12 pupils achieved grades A* to C in five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects which is just above the average for similar non-selective schools.

The school makes provision for 16 subjects at GCSE level. In the previous three years, the GCSE results at A* to C, in a majority of subjects, were more than five percentage points above the corresponding NI averages for non-selective schools, with three subjects being more than ten percentage points above the NI average. In a minority of subjects the results were more than ten percentage points below the NI average.

The year 14 pupils have a limited choice of eight subjects at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level. In general, these classes are small which restricts the pupils' opportunities for interaction and makes it difficult for them to develop important skills such as working in groups. Over the previous three years, in most GCE subjects, the results were within five percentage points of the NI average. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendices 3 and 4.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

In the majority of the lessons observed during the inspection the teaching was good or better, with a small number being excellent; in a significant minority of the lessons the teaching was sound and in a small number of lessons the weaknesses outweighed the strengths.

The characteristics of the best teaching included: good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils; high expectations of the standards which the pupils could achieve; pair or group activities where the pupils consolidated their learning through discussion and a clear focus on learning intentions which were shared with the pupils at the beginning of the lesson and referred to at the end of the lesson.

In the lessons where the teaching was less effective, the tasks were set at too low a level and lacked challenge; the pupils were unclear of what they were expected to learn; the questions asked did not encourage extended responses and classroom management strategies were ineffective.

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

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal is energetic, determined and involved in all aspects of the management of the school. He knows the pupils and their families well and he provides good leadership. While the School Development Plan (SDP) sets out appropriate priorities for improvement and there is some evidence of related planning and implementation, the SDP needs to be developed further to meet the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (NI) 2005 Order, on school development planning. In particular, the planned outcomes and the actions to achieve these outcomes, along with steps towards implementation and final dates for completion need to be included in the plan. In addition, there is a need to monitor and evaluate, at all levels of leadership, the extent to which the identified priorities are being met in practice.

Each department makes use of data on the pupils' performance to predict outcomes in examinations. This initiative needs to be supplemented by further monitoring and evaluating of the effectiveness of the teaching strategies in bringing about improvement. The examples of good practice which were observed during the inspection need to be disseminated further.

Employability skills which contribute to the school's provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) have been introduced successfully at key stage (KS) 3. In addition, sixth form pupils are given good support in the application process for further and higher education. However, the current provision for CEIAG is insufficient to enable all pupils to make informed decisions about the options open to them on leaving school. The school has identified the need to review its provision for CEIAG and the findings from the inspection endorse this priority.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the leadership and commitment of the Principal and the Vice- principal;

- the work of the industrious and dedicated teachers and the examples of very good teaching observed;
- the good relationships between the teachers and the pupils evident in almost all classes and the care and welfare of the pupils;
- the high standing of the school in the local community;
- the standards achieved by the pupils in most subjects; and
- the use of information on pupils' performance to raise standards.

3.2 The areas for improvement include:

- the need to review the School Development Plan to include appropriate action plans which will guide leaders, at all levels, to implement, monitor and evaluate improvement;
- the need to review the curriculum provided to increase the range of options available to the pupils and provide flexible pathways to study in further and higher education; and
- the need to provide a coherent programme for careers education, information, advice and guidance matched closely to the pupils' individual needs and aptitudes, as identified by the school, and confirmed by the inspection.

4. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few important areas for improvement which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

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

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Pastoral Care

The strengths of the work include:

- the commitment of the staff to the care and welfare of the pupils;
- the promotion of the pupils' positive behaviour through reward systems;
- the effective and committed leadership of the co-ordinator for child protection and pastoral care;
- the quality of the taught programme for pastoral care; and
- the involvement of external agencies in the pastoral programme.

Physical Education

The strengths of the work include:

- the good relationships between the pupils and the staff;
- the motivation, participation and positive response of the pupils;
- the opportunities provided for the pupils to work effectively in groups;
- the progression achieved in the lessons observed; and
- the motivating involvement in sporting activities with other schools.

The areas for improvement include:

- the need to provide a broad and balanced physical education programme for all pupils and increase the time allocated to the subject within the curriculum;
- the need to continue to review the planning for learning and teaching and to develop and refine the process of self-evaluation; and
- the need to improve the standards attained by the pupils in physical education.

Science

The strengths of the work include:

- the attractive learning environment which has been enhanced by the display of samples of the pupils' work;
- the effective use made of information and communication technology in science lessons;
- the wide range of practical activities experienced by the pupils;
- the effective day-to-day management of the science department by the teacher-in-charge.

The areas for improvement include:

- the need to improve the standards achieved by the pupils in examinations;
- the need for greater clarity in the role of the teacher-in-charge of the department, and the provision of an appropriate time allocation to allow her to carry out these duties; and
- the need to review the post-16 provision.

Design and Technology

The strengths include:

- the good relationships at all levels;
- the well-behaved pupils;
- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the management and organisation of the department;
- the good use of internal and external data to track the pupils' progress and attainment;
- the use of action planning to promote improvement in the department; and
- the good results in GCSE examinations.

APPENDIX 2

HEALTH AND SAFETY AND ACCOMMODATION

- Action needs to be taken on the recent South-Eastern Education and Library Board Health and Safety audit in the design and technology department.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Columba's College
 ii. School Reference Number: 423-0067
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Roman Catholic Maintained
- v. Date of Inspection: W/C 26/11/07
 vi. Area of Study: Standard

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	59	58	40	49	43
Total enrolment	302	306	293	288	271

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	93.9	90.7	89.9	90.5	89.1	89.6	88.3	92	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 24 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 88
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 11.25

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	23	31	19	31	34	7	4	149
Enrolment: Girls	20	19	21	21	28	8	5	122
Enrolment: Total	43	50	40	52	62	15	9	271

1.5 Staying On Rate (2006/07) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	36.7	NI Av Year 13	35.3
Year 14	26.0	NI Av Year 14	25.2

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2005/06	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	30		19	
Another School	10%	8.3	0%	1.6
Employment	10%	12	26%	18.5
Full-time Further Education	40%	37.6	0%	20.8
Full-time Higher Education	0%	N/A	74%	44.9
Full-time Training	40%	34.4	0%	6
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	4.2	0%	4.8
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.5	0%	3.3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Columba's College, Portaferry SCHOOL YEAR: 2006/2007

GCSE	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	82	84	93
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	45	51	52
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	78	63	78
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	67	33	50
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	100	100

APPENDIX 4

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the period from 2005 to 2007, 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	Art and Design English Irish	French Mathematics Music** Religious Studies Design and Technology	Business Studies History Home Economics** Information Technology		Double Award Science 1 st Subject Single Award Science Geography Sport/PE Studies
GCE A level A-E			Applied Business* Biology* English Literature* Fine Art* Geography* History* Religious Studies		Information Technology*

*Subjects had a total entry of less than 20 pupils over the three years.

**Subjects had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over the three 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*-C				Art and Design Information Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject Music	Business Studies Design and Technology English French Geography History Home Economics Irish Mathematics Religious Studies Single Award Science Sports/ PE Studies
GCE A level A-E	Applied Business Biology English Literature Fine Art Geography History Information Technology Religious Studies				

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2008

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the DE website: www.deni.gov.uk or may be obtained from the Inspection Services Branch, Department of Education, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR.