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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**St MacNissi's College
Garron Tower**

Inspected: November 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St MacNissi's College, Garron Tower is a co-educational voluntary grammar school, situated north of Carnlough, County Antrim. The college draws its pupils from a wide area which includes the towns of Ballycastle, Larne, Ballymena and the surrounding rural areas. In recent years, the enrolment has remained steady; 6% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. Over the last three years, 45% of the pupils entering the college achieved an A grade in the transfer procedure test. The school has identified 18 pupils as being in need of additional support with aspects of their learning. The Principal was appointed in September 2005.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the college and, in addition, on the provision for English, chemistry and modern languages. The provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also inspected as was the college's general approach to promoting healthy eating. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed lessons 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 a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the governors and groups of pupils from years 8, 12, 13 and 14.

One hundred and twenty questionnaires were issued to parents; 35% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 20 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were positive in their support of the work of the college. In particular, the parents commented on the high standing of the college in the community, the caring family ethos, and the quality of the induction arrangements for the beginning pupils.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the college, highlighting the very good working relationships that exist between pupils and teachers and the high regard for the college in the local community.

Approximately 60% of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with seven teachers providing additional written comments. In the main, the responses were positive, highlighting the effective working relationships between staff and pupils and the holistic nature of the approach to education in the college. A minority of teachers expressed concerns relating to the promotion of staff welfare.

In the discussions, the pupils talked enthusiastically about the pastoral and academic support they receive from teachers and their sense of belonging within the school. They reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their care and well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, any areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the college is very good. The college has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and pupils are fully aware of the college's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the college.

1.5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The college gives excellent attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles; for example, the School Nutrition Action Group, Whole Food in School policy, year 11 health promotion day, and themed healthy eating weeks.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS

The pupils are enthusiastic and motivated learners, who are keen to do well in their work. Over the past three years the percentage of pupils achieving seven or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades A*-C has fluctuated, however it has been within 5% of the Northern Ireland (NI) averages and overall there is an upward trend. In relation to individual subjects, nearly all are within 5% of the NI average or better, and a minority of subjects are more than 5% above the respective average.

Over the past three years the percentage of pupils achieving three or more General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level grades A-C has fluctuated; however there is an upward trend with steady improvement from 65% in 2005, to 76% in 2007. Most subjects are within 5% of the NI average or better, and a significant minority of subjects are more than 5% above the respective average. Two subjects are more than 10 percentage points below the NI average. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 3.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of the majority of the teaching was sound or better. In a minority of lessons the teaching was excellent. In the best practice, clear planning had built upon previous learning with high quality questioning promoting the pupils' thinking; differentiated tasks allowed pupils to work at their own pace with the teachers supporting effectively the pupil's progress. A significant minority of lessons were over-directed by the teacher, with few opportunities to exploit the pupils' views and allow them to develop their understanding and opinions. More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal, ably supported by the Vice-principal and the strategic leadership team, provides very good leadership. She demonstrates a clear vision for the college which has brought an effective focus to raising further the achievement and standards of all learners and greater accountability to leadership and management at all levels across the college.

There is a comprehensive school development plan (SDP) which sets out clear and appropriate priorities for improvement. These priorities are underpinned by detailed action plans and whole-school targets to improve learning and teaching, and raise further the standards the pupils achieve. The majority of the departmental plans have begun to complement the overall SDP. The college meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations Northern Ireland 2005.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the exemplary behaviour and high levels of motivation of the pupils;
- the good, and on occasions, excellent quality of much of the teaching;
- the caring ethos and sense of identity shared by pupils, parents, teachers, governors and the wider college community;
- the effective start made by the senior leadership team to the monitoring and evaluation of achievements and standards; and
- the effective and innovative leadership of the Principal, ably supported by the Vice-principal and strategic leadership team.

3.2 The main area for development is:

- the need to ensure that all initiatives impact directly on learning and teaching and are monitored and evaluated systematically.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 In the areas inspected, the college has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the college has the capacity to address.

4.2 The college's progress on the area for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits, conducted by the District Inspector.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Pastoral Care

The strengths of the work include:

- the exemplary behaviour of the pupils, who are well mannered, courteous, engaged and willing to learn;
- the incorporation of opportunities to develop peer support within the school;
- the recent appropriate developments to promote a pupil centred approach to pastoral care;
- the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities to enhance the pupils' learning and personal development;
- the effective integration of the pastoral dimension with the taught curriculum through its co-ordinated provision of personal development; and
- the high level of commitment and dedication displayed by the Head of pastoral care, and the support of Heads of Year and Form Tutors in addressing the pupils' pastoral needs.

Modern Languages Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the consistently sound, and often good, results;
- the variety of resources and techniques used to make language learning more interesting, including a growing use of information and communication technology;
- the good examples in a significant minority of the classes observed of the effective use of the target language, and the use of the pupils' previous knowledge, to build confidence and extend oral responses; and
- the timely review of standards, procedures and practice in which the department is currently engaged.

The areas for development include the need:

- for more consistent use of the target language throughout the department; and
- for increased opportunities for the pupils to consolidate what they have learned and to extend their oral and written responses.

Chemistry Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the excellent leadership of the head of department, with the department working effectively as a team, supported well by the Principal and the strategic leadership team;
- the departmental documentation which is of an excellent quality;
- the good quality self-evaluation recently carried out;
- the good balance between practical and theoretical work in most classes, with nearly all of the pupils reaching satisfactory to very good standards;
- the excellent teaching observed in a significant minority of the lessons, characterised particularly by the active involvement of the pupils; and
- the good teaching of necessary chemistry content and knowledge in all classes.

The area for development is:

- the need to develop further the use of the full range of information gained from monitoring and evaluation, including data available on the pupils' performance in external examinations to inform further the decision making, and improve further the standards.

English Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between staff and pupils;
- the high levels of pupil engagement in the lessons observed;
- the sound, and on occasion, excellent quality of the teaching;
- the effective sharing of resources across the department;
- the good beginning to the planning for literacy/English support for year 8, through the paired reading initiative; and
- the good start to the processes of reflective practice in the individual self-evaluation of a minority of lessons.

The areas for development include the need:

- to ensure that planning at departmental level demonstrates clear progression and coherence across the full English experience; and
- for more effective and skilful use of questioning to further develop the capacity to learn through oral exchange.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AND ACCOMMODATION

- Two of the science laboratories need refurbished, to deal with the health and safety issues identified by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board and the school; and
- The toilet facilities for some of the pupils are in need of refurbishment.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St MacNissi's College v. Date of Inspection: W/C 12/11/07
 ii. School Reference Number: 342-0094 vi. Area of Study: Standard
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	93	92	90	91	90
Total enrolment	620	606	591	597	597

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	96.5	95	94.1	94.1	93.6	95.9	93.7	95	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 40.2 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.76
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.85 iv. Numbers of Teachers involved in Area of Study: 18 (Focused Only)

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	50	47	39	55	35	34	32	292
Enrolment: Girls	40	45	50	38	55	37	40	305
Enrolment: Total	90	92	89	93	90	71	72	597
PTR	21.43	21.9	20.41	21.23	19.65	15.85	17.56	

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

Year 13	78.7	NI Av Year 13	88.8
Year 14	77.5	NI Av Year 14	85.0

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2005/06	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	23		63	
Another School	9%	17.2	3%	1
Employment	13%	4.3	0%	4.6
Full-time Further Education	39%	58.5	2%	9.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	90%	80.8
Full-time Training	35%	15.4	0%	1.1
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.9	0%	0.9
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	4%	3.8	5%	1.8

APPENDIX 4

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St MacNissi's College SCHOOL YEAR: 2006/2007

GCSE	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	91.58	88.76	92
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	96	93.26	96
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	66.25	67.21	76.47
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	91.25	96.72	97.06

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Within this report, when commenting on examination results of individual subjects, the respective CCEA average is used as a proxy for the corresponding average for all pupils in NI taking that subject.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 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	French Single Award Science	Additional Mathematics Learning for Life and Work Sport/PE Studies	Art and Design Business Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject Drama English English Literature History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Music Religious Studies Spanish Technology and Design	Geography Mathematics	Home Economics Food
GCE A Level A-C	Computer Studies/Computing Design and Technology Sport/PE Studies	Chemistry Drama Geography History Home Economics Politics	Art and Design Business Studies English Literature French Mathematics Modern Greek Religious Studies Spanish		Biology Physics

GCE A Level A-E			Art and Design Business Studies Chemistry Computer Studies/Computing Design and Technology Drama English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Modern Greek Physics Politics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies	Biology	
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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 Drama English Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Business Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject Double Award Science 2 nd Subject English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Home Economics Food Information Technology Irish Learning for Life and Work Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design	German Single Award Science		

GCE A Level A-C	Modern Greek	Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography History Mathematics Politics Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Home Economics Physics Sport/PE Studies		Computer Studies/Computing
GCE A Level A-E	Art and Design Biology Business Studies Chemistry Computer Studies/Computing Design and Technology Drama English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Modern Greek Physics Politics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies				

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