



*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 Mary's Grammar School  
Magherafelt**

**Inspected: February 2008**

## CONTENTS

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

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT

St Mary's Grammar School is a selective, co-educational, voluntary grammar school situated on the north side of Magherafelt. The school draws its pupils from a wide area which includes the town and surrounding rural region. Over the last three years, approximately 87% of the pupils entering year 8 obtained a grade A in the Transfer Procedure. The enrolment has remained steady in recent years, and currently 4.6% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 1% of the pupils as needing additional support.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, the provision for English, physical education and science. The inspection also evaluated the school's provision for pastoral care, including child protection.

In June 2007, the school was selected to take part in the specialist schools' programme, beginning in September 2007. The programme aims to develop the concept of specialist schools tailored to meet the particular needs of Northern Ireland's education system. As part of the inspection, the school's provision for their specialist status in science was evaluated.

A summary of the main findings for the subjects under focus is shown in Appendix 1.

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

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 Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Two hundred and fourteen questionnaires were issued to the parents; 51% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE), 58 of which provided additional written comments. Almost all of the responses indicated strong satisfaction with the work of the school; in particular, the parents mentioned the commitment of the staff, the extra-curricular opportunities, the high regard in which the school is held within the community and the high level of pastoral care.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school; they praised, in particular, the enthusiasm and dedication of the staff, the breadth of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils and the culture of self-evaluation established in the school.

Almost 62% of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire with 18 of them providing additional written comments. In particular, the teachers highlighted the promotion of the care and welfare of the pupils, the celebration of the pupils' achievements, the benefits of the staff development programme and the effective communication between senior managers and staff. A significant minority of the teachers raised the issue of staff well-being, in particular with reference to work-life balance. The school appropriately has identified this issue and it is addressed in the current school development plan.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the issues emerging from the questionnaires and discussions.

#### **1.4 PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION**

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

#### **1.5 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

The school gives excellent attention to promoting the health and well-being of the pupils, 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 healthy eating awards in the canteen and the School Nutrition Action Group.

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

#### **2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS**

Overall the standard that pupils achieve in public examinations is excellent. Over the past three years, the examination results at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level for pupils obtaining grade C or above in seven or more subjects has remained consistently well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Over the same period, the examination results at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level for pupils obtaining grade C or above in three or more subjects has also remained consistently well above the NI average. More details of all of the examination results can be found in Appendix 3.

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

The quality of the teaching in most of the lessons observed ranged from very good to outstanding. In the most effective practice the planning focused on meeting the needs of all the pupils and built on their prior learning. The teachers share the learning intentions and success criteria with the pupils, which become the focus for the consolidation of the learning during the plenary sessions. There are high expectations and teachers make effective use of a variety of teaching strategies which are linked to the pupils' preferred learning styles. The pupils make good use of self-evaluation to inform their progress and are actively involved in their learning.

## 2.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Principal provides outstanding leadership based on his knowledge of, and clear vision for, the school. He has developed a collegial approach at both senior and middle management levels, including the development of effective committees to lead whole-school issues such as in the areas of the quality of teaching and learning and self-evaluation. There is excellent leadership at all levels. Clear lines of communication have been established between senior management, staff, parents and governors. The Principal is well supported by the committed Vice-principals and the senior management team (SMT). The school has established a culture of self-evaluation and good strategies are in place to monitor, evaluate and inform whole-school planning. The Principal, SMT and heads of departments make good use of internal and external data and bench-marking to inform target setting for school and individual pupil improvement. The school development plan meets the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 clearly setting out the targets for the whole school through detailed action plans.

## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive pupil-centred ethos, which is characterised by the good working relationships at all levels and the exemplary behaviour of the pupils;
- the high level of the professional commitment and dedication of the teachers;
- the excellent standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations;
- the very good to outstanding quality of the teaching observed in most of the lessons;
- the effective leadership and management at all levels; and
- the outstanding leadership and vision of the Principal.

## 4. CONCLUSION

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is outstanding. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being very well met. The parents and the community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

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

### **Pastoral Care**

The strengths of the work include:

- the inclusive pupil-centred ethos;
- the excellent arrangements in place for the pastoral care of the pupils;
- the strong and effective leadership of the Vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care;
- the excellent work and support provided by key pastoral staff throughout the school;
- the school's capacity to self-evaluate its provision, which is informing school development planning and leading to improvement in the overall programme for pastoral care; and
- the high quality of the mentoring system which encourages independent learning amongst the pupils.

### **English**

The strengths of the work include:

- the hard-working and professional teachers and the collegiality within the department;
- the high expectations of the teachers which results in excellent standards;
- the quality of teaching which ranged from very good to excellent;
- the effective leadership of the department;
- the levels of motivation and engagement of the pupils; and
- the high standard of written work, which is supported well through marking for improvement.

### **Physical Education**

The strengths of the work include:

- the excellent standards achieved by pupils in public examinations;

- the quality of the teaching which ranged from very good to excellent;
- the increasing independence in the pupils' learning;
- the quality of the pupils' development of skills;
- the good links established with the community that extend further the opportunities for the pupils to develop their skills; and
- the effective working relationships between the teachers and the pupils.

## **Science**

The strengths of the work include:

- the excellent leadership at all levels and the strong sense of common purpose among the teachers;
- the high standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations and their competence in a range of scientific skills, such as interpreting experimental results and drawing appropriate conclusions;
- the pupils' effective use of self-evaluation to identify targets for improvement in their own performance in both scientific knowledge and skills;
- the high standard of teaching and the informed use of quantitative data, including bench-marked information, to improve further the standards achieved by the pupils;
- the informed use of information and communication technology to support the pupils' learning in areas such as researching information, using the Internet and developing experimental skills using data-logging equipment; and
- the wide range of resources produced by the teachers which engages, enthuses and enables the pupils to develop important scientific skills and knowledge.

## **Science as a Specialism**

The science specialism is an area of clear curricular strength.

The strengths include:

- the setting of appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate how the science specialism will be used to develop existing links with other schools, Colleges of Further Education and the wider community; and
- the viable financial planning to allocate funding for the science specialism.

For the purpose of showing improvement within the science specialism more clearly, the school needs to review some of the specialist school targets in order to demonstrate how the strengths in the science specialism have the potential to promote quality teaching and learning to contribute to whole-school development. The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school as part of the Specialist Schools' Programme.



### **ACCOMMODATION ISSUES**

- The quality and size of the accommodation curtails the positive learning experiences in some aspects of the curriculum such as careers education.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Mary's Grammar  
 ii. School Reference Number: 342-0080  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar  
 vi. Number of Families: 948
- vii. Date of Inspection: W/C 18/02/08  
 viii. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	176	162	153	155	172	159
Total enrolment	1115	1119	1116	1109	1100	1076

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	96.1	95.0	94.5	94.1	95.9	96.8	95.3	95.0	95.0

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:

68.4

- iii. Contact ratio (percentage of
- 
- timetabled time in direct
- 
- class contact):

0.73

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

15.7

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	76	76	68	67	76	68	52	483
Enrolment: Girls	83	98	83	86	78	81	84	593
Enrolment: Total	159	174	151	153	154	149	136	1076
PTR	18.55	18.56	15.95	15.20	14.17	14.70	13.76	

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

Year 13	86.7	NI Av	Year 13	88.8
Year 14	90.0	NI Av	Year 14	85.0

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2005/06	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	22		153	
Another School	18%	17.2	0%	1
Employment	0%	4.3	4%	4.6
Full-time Further Education	45%	58.5	1%	9.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	93%	80.8
Full-time Training	36%	15.4	1%	1.1
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.9	0%	0.9
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.8	0%	1.8

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Mary's Grammar School,  
Magherafelt

SCHOOL YEAR: 2007/2008

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	99.4	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	99.4	97.4	97.1
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	99.4	98.7	100
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	86.5	85.1	90.7
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	99.3	99.3	98

## EXAMINATION RESULTS

**Table 1** showing GCSE subject results, over the three years ending in June 2007, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages.

	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	German Spanish	Additional Mathematics Economics Geography Information Technology Physics Science Double Award 1st Subject Sport/PE Studies Technology & Design	Art and Design Biology Chemistry Drama English English Literature French History *Home Economics **Home Economics Child Development Irish Mathematics Music Religious Studies		
GCE A-C	Biology Economics English Literature French Home Economics Information Technology Spanish Sport/PE Studies	Chemistry Drama Geography History Irish Mathematics Physics Religious Studies Technology and Design	Art and Design Business Studies Music		

\* Results for 2005 only.    \*\* Results for 2006 and 2007.

**Table 2** showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A*-C	Art & Design Biology Chemistry Drama English Home Economics Child Development Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Economics English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Physics Religious Studies Science Double Award 1st Subject Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design	German Science Single Award		
GCE A-C		Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography German History History of Art and Design Irish Mathematics Music Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Economics Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design		

GCE A-E	Art and Design Biology Business Studies Chemistry Drama Economics English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography German History History of Art and Design Home Economics Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music Physics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design				
------------	---	--	--	--	--

**Table 3** showing AVCE Single Award results for the past three years.

<b>Grades A-C</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Business Studies	100%	100%	100%
Heath and Social Care	100%	100%	100%

© 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](http://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.