



*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 Mark's High School
Warrenpoint**

Inspected: November 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Mark's is a maintained, co-educational high school providing education for 11-19 year old pupils. The enrolment has shown small but steady growth over recent years; the pupils are drawn from the town of Warrenpoint and the surrounding rural area. Almost 27% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school introduced sixth form provision in September 2004 and offers 13 subjects for post-16 pupils, some of which are provided in conjunction with the local college of further education and neighbouring selective and non-selective post-primary schools. Approximately 28% of pupils require additional support with their learning. The Principal has been in post since February 2008. 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, 12, 13 and 14 were interviewed. One hundred and sixty-eight questionnaires were issued to the parents, 45% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 27 contained additional written comments. Almost all 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 highlighted the care and attention of the teachers, the development of the pupils' self-confidence and the high regard in which the school is held by the local community.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the very few issues of concern emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff questionnaires. The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal's leadership and their appreciation of the work of the Vice-principal, formerly the Acting-principal. In addition, they highlighted the hard work and collegiality of the staff, the strong links with the local community and the support of the parents for the work of the school.

Almost half of the teachers and seven support staff completed a confidential questionnaire, with eight providing additional written comments. The responses were almost entirely positive, citing, in particular, the excellent relationships between the teachers and the pupils, the commitment of the governors in their support for the school and the support provided for pupils with special education needs.

In discussions, the pupils talked enthusiastically about the support they receive from the teachers, the mutual respect between pupils and staff and the friendly atmosphere within the school. There is evidence that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and 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, history and modern languages, and the provision for pupils requiring alternative education arrangements. 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 most 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 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The pupils show interest and are generally motivated to do well in their work. Almost all 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 the results obtained by the pupils in GCSE grades A*-C are very good. In 2008, more than 57% of the year 12 pupils achieved grades A*-C in five or more subjects and the number of pupils receiving grades A*-C including English and mathematics is well above the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar non-selective schools. These strong performances are also reflected at General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A level); in 2008, a majority of the year 14 pupils achieved grade C or above in three subjects which is comparable with the NI average for selective schools and almost all achieved grade E or above in at least two subjects taken at post-16.

The number of subjects on offer at post-16 level is, however, narrow and the school needs to broaden the choice of options available to pupils at this level. The school is committed to developing further its collaboration arrangements with other providers.

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

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The majority of the teaching observed is good or better. In the best practice, the teachers share the intended learning outcomes with the pupils, use a variety of suitable teaching approaches including active learning strategies, and encourage the pupils to reflect and consolidate their learning through effective plenary sessions. Where the teaching is less effective, in a minority of lessons, there is poor classroom management, over exposition by the teacher and few opportunities provided for the pupils to develop as independent learners.

2.3 ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ARRANGEMENTS

The school's capacity to ensure its commitment to pupils at risk of marginalisation is very good. The school promotes an inclusive approach to teaching and learning, taking full account of the differing abilities and circumstances of pupils. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the actions taken by teachers to ensure that their diverse needs are met, and provide many examples of pupils supporting each other to maintain a caring and inclusive learning environment.

2.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. This is displayed through the positive working relationships across the school, the contribution of the pupils to the school life and the wide range of curricular activities which support their personal and social development. The senior teacher with responsibility for pastoral care gives effective leadership and is ably supported by the pastoral team.

2.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

2.6 HEALTHY EATING/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example healthy food provision in the canteen and extra-curricular life-skills and sports provision. The school has identified appropriate areas for improvement as the need to establish a health promoting team to guide and support whole-school healthy eating programmes, and the formalisation of monitoring and evaluation efforts of food-related health initiatives.

2.7 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is very good. She has a clear vision for the development of the school and has already demonstrated her strong commitment to whole school improvement. Since taking up post, and within a challenging time frame, she has made significant progress towards establishing rigorous systems of monitoring and evaluation, including the self-evaluation of almost all aspects of the school's work, to inform the process of strategic school development planning. Comprehensive strategic and operational plans are in place underpinned by a series of detailed action plans to bring about improvement in key aspects of the school's work. Appropriately, the Principal recognises the need to involve staff at all levels in the school development planning process and is working towards meeting fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

The Principal places a suitably strong emphasis on the analysis and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data to inform the evaluation of the quality of the school's provision. To this end a data manager has been appointed and senior and middle management are working towards developing this aspect of their role.

The senior and middle management teams are dedicated and hard-working, they have a strong sense of collegial responsibility and work tirelessly in the best interests of the pupils. While almost all manage their respective responsibilities effectively, there is a need to develop further their role to promote and support the strategic development of the school.

There is effective communication between the Principal and the governors; the governors are hard-working and highly committed to the whole school community. They are well informed about school developments and are appropriately involved in decisions regarding the strategic direction of the school.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the strong vision and leadership provided by the Principal;
- the quality of teaching of which the majority was good or better;
- the very good standards achieved in public examinations;
- the hard work and dedication of the governors and their commitment to the whole-school community;
- the friendly, well behaved pupils who take pride in their school; and
- the opportunities for the pupils to become involved in the decision making of the work of the school.

The area for improvement is:

- to develop further the existing good practice to raise the teachers' expectations of the pupils and to promote strategies to enable all pupils to become increasingly active and independent learners.

4. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its education and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

APPENDIX 1

English

The main strengths of the English department are:

- the standards achieved in GCSE English, which are above average for schools of a similar type;
- the teaching, most of which is satisfactory and a minority of which is very good or better;
- the leadership provided by the acting head of English; and
- the start made in identifying the areas for improvement.

The main areas for improvement are to:

- bring stability to the staffing of the department and create an identity for English teaching for the benefit of the school; and
- disseminate the good teaching and learning observed during the inspection in order to raise standards.

History

The main strengths of the history department are:

- the stimulating learning environment which encourages interest in historical issues;
- the use of local contexts, contemporary politics and educational visits to make history relevant for the pupils; and
- the good start made to self-evaluation.

The main areas for improvement are to:

- raise standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE; and
- develop appropriate planning at key stage (KS) 4, and develop further planning at KS3, with a clear focus on learning and teaching to meet the needs of pupils more effectively.

Modern Languages

The main strengths of the modern languages department are:

- the hard-working and committed teachers and the individual support they provide for the pupils;
- the positive response of most of the pupils to learning languages;
- the very good standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good and a minority of which was very good; and
- the effective self-evaluation and identification of appropriate areas for development.

The area for improvement is to:

- develop further the teaching strategies to involve the pupils more actively in the learning and to promote independent learning.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

- There is evidence that the sufficiency and suitability of accommodation is having a negative impact on the continuity of learning and teaching.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Mark's High
 ii. School Reference Number: 523-0135
 iii. Age Range: 11-17
 iv. Status: Roman Catholic Maintained
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 10.11.08
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 8 Intake	123	166	146	127	159
Total enrolment	830	861	859	840	841

1.3 Attendance

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2007/08	NI Average 2006/07
% Attendance	94.2	92.7	93.2	91.8	87.8	94.2	92.9	92	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 55
 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.77
 ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 15.07
 iv. Number of teachers involved in Area of Study (Focused only): 14

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	74	62	81	93	60	20	9	399
Enrolment: Girls	85	66	69	79	57	46	40	442
Enrolment: Total	159	128	150	172	117	66	49	841
PTR	15.54	16.57	14.70	15.30	14.37	15.55	12.25	

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

Year 13	38.8	NI Av Year 13	37.4
Year 14	42.9	NI Av Year 14	N/A

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	83		83	
Another School	12%	11.1	6%	2
Employment	0%	12.4	9.6%	19.5
Full-time Further Education	7%	37.2	7%	21
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	70%	42
Full-time Training	79.5%	30.1	6%	6.6
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	4.1	0%	4.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	1.2%	4.9	1.2%	4.6

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Mark's High

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

GCSE	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	80.95	89.73	94.81
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	61.31	54.79	57.04
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	78.57	81.51	81.48
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	52.0	60.61	73.13
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	97.73	100	98.51

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 for non-selective schools

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	Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject English French Geography Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Irish Motor Vehicle Studies Music Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies	Mathematics	Art and Design Business Studies Drama		English Literature History Sociology
GCSE A*-E	Motor Vehicle Studies	Design and Technology Drama English French Geography Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music Religious Studies Single Award Science	Art and Design Business Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature History Home Economics Child Development Sociology Sport/PE Studies		

	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
GCE A2 Level A-C	Chemistry Design and Technology: Product Design	Art and Design Religious Studies	Geography		Biology Mathematics Sociology
GCE A2 Level A-E			Art and Design Biology Chemistry Design and Technology: Product Design Geography Mathematics Religious Studies Sociology		

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			Information Technology Music	Accounting/Finance Art and Design Double Award Science 1 st Subject Drama English Literature Sociology	Business Studies Design and Technology English French Geography History Home Economics Home Economics Child Development Irish Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	English Literature	Art and Design Double Award Science 1 st Subject Drama English History Home Economics Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Irish Music Office Technology Sociology Sport/PE Studies	Accounting/Finance Business Studies Design and Technology French Geography Mathematics Religious Studies Single Award Science	Motor Vehicle Studies	

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCE A Level A-C		Art and Design Geography Mathematics Religious Studies	Biology Chemistry Sociology	Design and Technology: Product Design	
GCE A Level A-E	Art and Design Biology Chemistry Design and Technology: Product Design Geography Mathematics Religious Studies Sociology				

Table 3 Double Award Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education

	2006		2007		2008		Total entry over 3 years
	% A-C	% A-E	% A-C	% A-E	% A-C	% A-E	
A Level Applied Business	97.7	100	100	100	94.2	100	110
A Level Applied Health & Social Care	95.2	100	88	100	97.4	100	106
A Level Applied Information Technology	100	100	95.5	100	96.5	100	103

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