The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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

Sullivan Upper School
Holywood

Inspected: October 2008

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

Sullivan Upper School is a co-educational 11-18 selective school. The school is situated in Holywood and serves a wide area of North Down, mainly between Belfast and Bangor and the corresponding hinterland. The enrolment has remained stable over recent years. Almost all of the pupils entering year 8 have achieved a grade A in the Transfer Procedure. Just under 4% of the pupils have been identified as needing additional support for their learning, due to medical or educational factors. Fewer than 2% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support 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 seventy-two questionnaires were issued to parents; 78% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 58 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires and the comments from the parents were mostly affirmative of the work of the school. In particular, the parents mentioned the caring ethos, the high standards achieved by the pupils in examinations, the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided, the high reputation in the community and that their children enjoyed school. A minority of parents expressed concern about the careers guidance offered for their children. An evaluation of the careers programme is given in the body of the report. The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school, highlighting the leadership of the Principal, the good relationships between pupils and staff and the excellent academic standards.

The pupils talked enthusiastically about the variety of extra-curricular activities and the opportunities within the school to hold offices of responsibility and show leadership. The year 8 pupils reported very positive experiences of their induction into school life. There is evidence that the pupils are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety, care and well-being.

Forty-one teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with 18 teachers providing additional written comments. Thirty-eight support staff completed their questionnaire. Both sets of responses were mostly positive referring to the good behaviour of the pupils, the quality of pastoral care, the high standards maintained, and that they enjoyed working in the school. A minority referred to some inconsistency in the application of the discipline procedures for the pupils.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the few other areas of concern emerging from the respective questionnaires.

1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on learning and teaching and leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for geography, mathematics, and design and technology. The school's provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also evaluated as was the school's general approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in a range of 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 well motivated and talk with confidence and understanding about their work. They use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their learning, assess their own work accurately and make valid judgements about one another's work. They can work independently and collaboratively, depending on the tasks set. They are developing excellent personal and social skills and when given the opportunity engage actively in their learning.

The pupils' achievement in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades A*-C in at least seven subjects, including English and mathematics, has fluctuated over recent years, ranging from excellent to satisfactory compared to the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. Over the previous three years, the GCSE results at grades A*-B in almost all subjects were within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average. In a minority of subjects, these results are more than ten percentage points above the NI average.

The pupils achieve excellent standards at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level. Over the last two years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A Level grades A-C is well above the NI average for similar selective schools. Over the previous three years, most subjects are within, or above, five percentage points of the respective NI average at GCE A level grades A-C and a minority of subjects are ten percentage points above this average. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendices 3 and 4.

The school offers a comprehensive range of subjects at both key stage (KS) 4 and sixth form. In recent years, there has been a useful broadening of the sixth form curriculum with the addition of a number of applied and vocational subjects in collaboration with other organisations. In particular, appropriate joint provision has been established with the local non-selective school.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of the most of the teaching observed was good; a significant minority was very good. In the best practice seen, the teachers had clear learning intentions which were shared with the pupils and evident in the outworking of the lessons; there were opportunities for collaborative learning and good discussions which promoted the pupils' thinking skills and reinforced their confidence and understanding; appropriate use was made of formative

assessment strategies, including good self and peer assessment by the pupils; often the lessons concluded with well-focused plenary sessions which consolidated the learning. There is evidence that the level of challenge in year 8 is suitably high; for example in mathematics and ICT, appropriate cognisance is taken of the pupils' prior learning in primary school. The teachers prepare well for their lessons. The overall departmental planning in schemes of work is more variable and, in some subjects, there is limited reference to appropriate learning and teaching strategies. The careers education programme provides pupils with good opportunities to explore various options and to match careers to their personal capabilities.

PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. This is displayed through the very caring and supportive ethos, the collegiality of approach from the staff with pastoral responsibilities and the commitment to providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities to support the pupils' personal, social and physical development. The Vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care gives effective and strategic leadership.

CHILD PROTECTION

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

HEALTHY EATING/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal has a clear and appropriate vision for the development of the school which is focused on improving the pupils' learning and broadening the opportunities open to them. He displays excellent strategic leadership, often by example in his interaction with pupils, parents, teachers and governors. He is ably supported by an effective Senior Management Team (SMT) with clearly defined and complementary roles. There is a detailed School Development Plan (SDP) which complies fully with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order. The governors play an active and appropriate role in their oversight of the work of the school.

There is a strong tradition of a detailed analysis of examination performance by subject which includes annual review and implementation of identified areas for improvement. There has also been some useful monitoring of aspects of the introduction of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum. The school has identified the need to extend this self-evaluation process more systematically at departmental level to focus on learning and teaching across the school; the inspection findings endorse this objective.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the caring and supportive ethos facilitated by the very good pastoral care of the pupils;

- the very good behaviour, motivation and engagement of the pupils;

- the overall high standards in examinations and the wider skills and attributes developed by the pupils;

- the good quality of most of the teaching and the very good quality of a significant minority of lessons observed;

- the excellent strategic and visionary leadership of the Principal, ably supported by an effective SMT; and

- the detailed analysis and review of examination performance and the good start to promoting broader self-evaluation processes across the school.

4. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Geography

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good working relationships between teachers and pupils;
- the good standards attained by pupils at GCSE and the very good standards at GCE A Level;
- the effective use of a range of resources, examples and case studies to develop the pupils' geographical knowledge and understanding;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or very good;
- the effective leadership of the head of department; and
- the hard work, commitment and collegiality of the teachers.

The area for improvement is:

- the need to continue to develop departmental planning across KS3 to guide learning and teaching and promote best practice.

Mathematics

The strengths of the work include:

- the quality of the teaching, most of which is very good;
- the good levels of individual support given to pupils during lessons;
- the very good standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations at all levels;
- the appropriate range of opportunities for the pupils to be actively engaged in their learning through paired and group work, particularly in years 8 and 9;
- the good progress that is being made in developing peer and self-assessment, particularly at KS3; and
- the good leadership provided by the head of department, and the dedication and hard work of the mathematics teachers.

Technology and Design

The strengths of the work include:

- the good relationships at all levels;
- the well-behaved pupils;
- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the well-managed and organised department;
- the good procedures in place to collate internal and external data to monitor and evaluate the pupils' progress and attainment; and
- the very good results at KS4 and GCE A level.

The area for improvement is:

- the need to continue to revise the schemes of work and projects to ensure there is a suitable balance between practical manufacturing, design skills and control systems in the pupils' learning experiences.

APPENDIX 2

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The main entrance to the school is situated on a busy road which many of the pupils have to cross at peak traffic periods. The lack of traffic calming measures or safe crossing facilities represents a serious safety hazard for these pupils.

ACCOMMODATION

- There are some deficiencies in the accommodation for physical education.
- The toilets need modernisation.
- The corridors in the older part of the school are narrow and restrict the movement of pupils between classes.

APPENDIX 3

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

1.1 i. School: Sullivan Upper
ii. School Reference Number: 442-0044
iii. Age Range: 11-18
iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar
v. Date of Inspection: W/C 13.10.08
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	152	152	152	150	152
Total enrolment	1067	1065	1066	1061	1064

1.3 Attendance

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2007/08	NI Average 2006/07
% Attendance	97.4	96.7	96.1	96.1	96.1	96.1	94.8	96	95

1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 71.3

ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.92

iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.786

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	94	84	92	99	94	88	81	632
Enrolment: Girls	58	69	65	57	65	50	68	432
Enrolment: Total	152	153	157	156	159	138	149	1064
PTR	17.371	16.943	16.636	14.958	15.434	11.004	13.783	

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

Year 13	97.5	**NI Av Year 13**	91.7
Year 14	87.6	**NI Av Year 14**	83.7

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2006/07	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	16		156	
Another School	4	22.6%	0	1.3%
Employment	1	5%	10	5.1%
Full-time Further Education	8	54.4%	14	8.4%
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	132	81.7%
Full-time Training	0	11.7%	0	1.2%
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	2	1.9%	0	0.9%
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	1	4.5%	0	1.3%

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Sullivan Upper SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

GCSE	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	99.34	99.37	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	97.37	98.11	96.08
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	94.08	96.86	90.2
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	70.07	81.25	80.15
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	81.02	91.67	96.95

APPENDIX 4

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level 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*-B	Additional Mathematics Biology Irish* Mathematics Single Award Science Spanish Technology and Design	Art and Design Chemistry English English Literature French Geography History Information Technology Physics	Double Award Science 1st Subject Home Economics Music Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	German	
GCE A level A-C	Design and Technology: product design English Literature German** Music**	Biology History Home Economics Mathematics Politics Sport/PE Studies	Art and Design Chemistry Computer Studies/ Computing** French Geography Moving Image Art Physics Religious Studies Spanish**	Economics Further Mathematics** Information Technology	

* Denotes subjects with a total entry of less than 30 pupils over three years.
** Denotes subject with total entry of less than 20 pupils over 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*-B		Information Technology	Art and Design Biology Chemistry English English Literature History Home Economics Irish Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Additional Mathematics Geography Mathematics Physics Spanish	Double Award Science 1st Subject French German Single Award Science
GCE A level A-C		Art and Design English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography German History Mathematics Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish Moving Image Arts	Biology Chemistry Economics Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport/PE Studies	Computer Studies/Computing Design and Technology: product design	

© 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.