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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

Slemish College
Ballymena

Inspected: April 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Slemish College is a co-educational, grant-maintained, all-ability, integrated school situated off the Larne Road in Ballymena. The school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area, including Antrim, Randalstown and Larne. Over the past three years just under half of the intake obtained grades A-C in the Transfer Procedure. Approximately 15% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 11% of the pupils as needing additional support with their learning.

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

One hundred and fifty-two questionnaires were issued to parents; 48% were returned to the Department of Education and 43 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires were highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the work and life of the school. The parents commented on the effective partnership between home and school, the friendly and approachable teachers, and the high quality of the care and support for their children.

Over one-third of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with nine teachers providing additional written comments. Fifteen support staff completed a confidential questionnaire. Almost all of these responses were wholly positive praising the visionary leadership of the Principal and the excellent working relationships at all levels.

The governors expressed strong support for the work of the school and the leadership of the Principal and the senior leadership team (SLT). In particular, they commented favourably on the excellent standards attained by the pupils and the wide range of opportunities for the pupils to gain in confidence and self-esteem.

In discussions, the pupils talked enthusiastically about their experiences in school. In particular, they value highly the commitment shown by their teachers and the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school to assist their personal and social development. In discussions held with pupils, there is evidence that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the few other matters emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff 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 humanities (English and geography), history and science. The school's provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection, and the provision for pupils with special educational needs were also evaluated as well as the school's general approach towards promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in a range of other subjects.

In June 2008, the school was selected to take part in the specialist schools' programme, beginning in September 2008. The programme aims to develop the concept of specialist schools tailored to meet the particular needs of Northern Ireland's (NI's) education system. As part of the inspection, the school's provision for their specialist status in humanities was evaluated.

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

Overall, the pupils achieve high standards. They are highly motivated, engage well in, and talk confidently about, their learning. They can work independently and collaboratively and demonstrate excellent personal and social skills.

Almost all of the pupils in year 12 are entered for five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the levels of attainment are excellent. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades at A*-C over the past three years, including English and mathematics, has been well above the NI average for non-selective schools. At GCSE grades A*-C, most subjects are ten percentage points or more above the NI average and show steady improvement.

Levels of attainment in General Certificate in Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level are very good. Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more A level grades at A-C has also shown steady improvement. At grades A-E, most subjects are above or within five percentage points of the NI average for all schools.

The school offers a comprehensive range of subjects at both key stage (KS) 4 and post-16 level. The school has broadened effectively its curricular provision with the addition of a number of applied and vocational subjects. The school demonstrates a willingness to work effectively with other organisations for the benefit of its pupils.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of almost all of the teaching observed ranged from good to outstanding: three-quarters of the lessons were very good or outstanding. In the best practice observed, the teachers demonstrated a very clear understanding of the learning cycle, used assessment for learning strategies effectively, made explicit connections in the learning process, and used

a wide range of ‘cutting-edge’ learning and teaching approaches and resources to support learning and guide the pupils. During these lessons the pupils contributed actively to the learning process, developed their higher order thinking skills and articulated high level responses to the teachers’ effective and skilful questioning. There were also appropriate and frequent opportunities for the pupils to develop their independent learning. Much of the more effective practice observed was predicated on catering for the pupils’ individual learning preferences, and consolidating and celebrating the learning at appropriate intervals. The teachers are extremely hard-working, prepare thoroughly for lessons, convey appropriately high expectations, and show sensitivity and understanding of the pupils’ learning needs. Creative and innovative approaches to learning and teaching permeate throughout the school.

2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. The staff team with responsibility for pastoral care give high priority to the emotional health and well-being of their pupils. This is demonstrated in the excellent quality of the working relationships between the staff and the pupils and the caring, and supportive ethos throughout the school.

2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

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

2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the incentives to encourage healthy food choices in the refectory and popular after-school cookery clubs, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.6 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The learning support team is continually developing new ways to support and improve the quality of education for these pupils. The pupils’ progress is monitored effectively against their individual education plan targets.

The school’s capacity to ensure its commitment to those pupils at risk of marginalisation is outstanding. The school promotes a culture of inclusion and takes consistent action at an early stage to identify and support pupils at risk of falling behind or dropping out of school. Significant steps are also taken to nurture these pupils’ emotional development, providing a basis for them to learn successfully and feel included.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The leadership of the Principal is outstanding. He has the ability to inspire, challenge and empower all in the school community, and is supported ably by a highly effective SLT with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The Principal and SLT are well-informed, committed educationalists. A strong focus on learning and teaching permeates all aspects of

the work and life of the school, resulting in an excellent outworking of the vision statement, 'learning together for individual success'. The governors play a strategic role in supporting and overseeing the work of the school.

The school's process for improvement has many strengths; it is clearly linked to a school development plan (SDP) that complies with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. There are excellent opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community, effective target-setting and benchmarking at whole-school level, and an appropriate staff development programme that meets well the needs of the school and individual teachers. There is an outstanding culture of self-evaluation that underpins the development work at all levels throughout the school. The school has identified appropriately the need to continue to build capacity at middle management level and has demonstrated a commitment to providing a range of continuing professional development opportunities to support this work.

The school takes a holistic approach to developing its pupils. Through effective monitoring and tracking of the pupils' performance, the school is able to provide individual support and effective mentoring that is tailored to the needs of its pupils and underpins the improvement in the standards over recent years.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the high standards that the pupils achieve, including the excellent levels of attainment in public examinations at the end of KS4;
- the very good to outstanding quality of the teaching observed in a majority of the lessons;
- the significance given to innovative and creative learning and teaching approaches which permeate throughout the school;
- the outstanding culture of self-evaluation that underpins the development work at all levels to effect improvement;
- the excellent outworking of the vision statement, 'learning together for individual success' in all aspects of the work of the school; and
- the outstanding leadership of the Principal and his ability to inspire, challenge and empower all in the school community, supported ably by a highly effective SLT.

5. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECT AREAS UNDER FOCUS

History

The strengths of the work include:

- the high standards attained by the pupils in public examinations;
- the quality of the teaching which ranged from very good to outstanding in the lessons observed;
- the quality of the responses by the pupils in making connections between the past and the present and the pupils' understanding of the moral purpose of studying history;
- the use of a wide range of learning and teaching activities to engage the pupils actively in their learning, to challenge and develop the pupils' thinking, and to meet effectively the needs of the individual learners;
- the creative and stimulating learning environment, including the celebration of the pupils' work; and
- the outstanding commitment by the teachers to continuous improvement and the highly effective leadership of the head of department.

Science

The strengths of the work include:

- the overall very good standards reached by the pupils in practical and theoretical work, including those attained in public examinations;
- the very good or outstanding quality of the teaching observed in a majority of the lessons;
- the many opportunities for practical work observed in most of the lessons and the pupils' good use of information and communication technology for a range of purposes;
- the departmental documentation, which is of a very good quality, and includes a science strategic development plan setting out appropriate priorities for the medium and longer term;
- the good use of quantitative and benchmarked data to track the pupils' progression in their learning and the standards they reach; and

- the good leadership of the head of science, with an appropriate and effective emphasis on promoting team-work within the department.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SPECIALIST AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The school has identified appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate:

- that English is an area of clear curricular strength;
- how the strengths in English have the potential to promote quality learning and teaching and whole-school improvement;
- how they will use English to develop existing links with other schools, higher education and the wider community, including business and industry; and
- viable financial planning to allocate funding.

The strengths of the provision for English also include:

- the high standards achieved in public examinations;
- the good standards of writing in all classes;
- the quality of the teaching all of which is good, most of it is very good and some outstanding;
- the very good working relationships established in every class;
- the good start made to implementing the revised curriculum; and
- the department's self-evaluation which identifies appropriate areas for development.

For the purpose of showing improvement more consistently the English department must be able to demonstrate and articulate the action required to build on the school's capacity for improvement.

Geography

The school has identified appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate:

- that geography is an area of clear curricular strength, which has very good levels of attainment;

- how the strengths in geography have the potential to promote quality learning and teaching and whole-school improvement;
- how they will use geography to develop existing links with other schools, higher education and the wider community, including business and industry; and
- viable financial planning to allocate funding.

The strengths of the provision for geography also include:

- the high standards attained by the pupils in public examinations;
- the quality of teaching which ranged from very good to outstanding in the lessons observed;
- the use of a wide range of learning and teaching approaches, including the creative use of digital and web-based resources to develop the pupils' thinking skills and support them in their learning;
- the excellent working relationships between the teachers and the pupils, and the motivation and enjoyment of the pupils in their learning;
- the opportunities for investigative fieldwork at KS3 to develop a range of geographical and cross-curricular skills, and the imaginative approaches used to promote environmental and global awareness throughout the school; and
- the inspirational leadership of the head of department and the dedication of all the teachers in promoting and sharing a culture of innovation and self-evaluation.

For the purpose of showing improvement more consistently the school needs to review appropriately the targets for GCSE and GCE A level achievement.

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school as part of the Specialist Schools' Programme.

APPENDIX 2

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation for physical education is inadequate.
- The storage accommodation for technology and design is inadequate.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a need to conduct a risk assessment in the technology and design department.

APPENDIX 3

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Slemish College v. Date of Inspection: W/C 27.04.09
 ii. School Reference Number: 326-0289 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Grant Maintained Integrated

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

| School Year | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Year 8 Intake | 121 | 126 | 125 | 126 | 127 | 129 |
| Total enrolment | 676 | 690 | 705 | 718 | 745 | 745 |

1.3 Attendance

| Year 2007/08 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | Average 2007/08 | NI Average 2006/07 |
|--------------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|--------------------|
| % Attendance | 94.48 | 94.3 | 91.01 | 91.84 | 93.76 | 93.48 | 90.23 | 93 | 90 |

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 51.2 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.75
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.55

| Year 2008/09 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | TOTAL |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Enrolment: Boys | 55 | 54 | 68 | 64 | 56 | 28 | 22 | 347 |
| Enrolment: Girls | 74 | 71 | 58 | 57 | 70 | 40 | 28 | 398 |
| Enrolment: Total | 129 | 125 | 126 | 121 | 126 | 68 | 50 | 745 |
| PTR | 18.07 | 17.51 | 17.65 | 13.57 | 14.06 | 9.93 | 9.09 | |

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

| | | | |
|---------|------|---------------|-----|
| Year 13 | 53.6 | NI Av Year 13 | N/A |
| Year 14 | 48.2 | NI Av Year 14 | N/A |

1.6 Leavers Destinations

| 2006/07 | Year 12 | NI% | Year 13/14 | NI% |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|------------|-----|
| Total Number of Leavers | 68 | | 58 | |
| Another School | 1% | 11.1 | 7% | N/A |
| Employment | 4% | 12.4 | 2% | N/A |
| Full-time Further Education | 94% | 37.2 | 2% | N/A |
| Full-time Higher Education | N/A | N/A | 88% | N/A |
| Full-time Training | 0% | 30.1 | 2% | N/A |
| Seeking Employment/Unemployed | 0% | 4.1 | 0% | N/A |
| Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant | 0% | 4.9 | 0% | N/A |

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Slemish College

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

| GCSE | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects | 85.59 | 92.66 | 99.15 |
| Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects | 62.16 | 58.72 | 80.34 |
| Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics | 52.25 | 48.62 | 58.12 |
| Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects | 83.78 | 87.16 | 94.87 |
| GCE A2 Level or equivalent | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels | 27.59 | 55.77 | 58.49 |
| Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels | 79.31 | 100 | 96.23 |

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing GCSE A Level subject results over the previous three years ending 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*-C | Art & Design Biology* Business Studies Chemistry* Double Award Science 1 st Subject English English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music* Physic* Religious Studies Single Award Science Spanish Sport/PE Studies Systems | Drama Home Economics Child Development | | GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment* | Additional Mathematics Office Technology |

* Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over 3 years.

| | 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 A Level A-E | Law** | Psychology | Art & Design Chemistry** Design and Technology: Product Design Drama** English English Literature** French** Geography History Home Economics** Media Film and TV Studies Music** Politics** Sport/PE Studies** | Biology** Religious Studies** | Mathematics** Physics** Spanish** |

** Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 20 pupils over 3 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 | | | Additional Mathematics Art & Design Biology Chemistry Drama Information Technology Music Physics | Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature | Business Studies English French Geography GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment History Home Economics Home Economics Child Development Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science Spanish Sport/PE Studies Systems |

| | 100% - 96% | 95% - 86% | 85% - 76% | 75% - 66% | 65% - 0% |
|-----------------------|---|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| GCE A Level A-E | Art & Design Biology Chemistry Design and Technology: Product Design Drama English English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music Physics Politics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies | Psychology | | | Law |

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