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*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

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**St Columbanus' College
Bangor**

Inspected: November 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Columbanus' College is a well established co-educational 11-18 school which serves Bangor and the surrounding area. The enrolment has steadily increased over the past five years to its present figure of 544. Just under one-sixth of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and 17% of the pupils require additional support with their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English, mathematics and science. The provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also evaluated. The school's provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and the arrangements for the inclusion of all pupils in every aspect of school life was also inspected as was the school's approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, lessons were observed across a range of other subjects and inspectors met with subject leaders and others with posts of responsibility for a range of other aspects of school life.

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

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the teaching staff and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. In addition, meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10 and 12.

One hundred and nine questionnaires were issued to parents; 53 were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 28 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires and the comments from the parents, in the majority of cases, indicated their high levels of satisfaction with the work and life of the school. In particular, they highlighted their strong support and appreciation for the pastoral ethos and stated how happy and content their children were at school. In particular, the parents commented on the dedication and commitment of all the school staff.

Thirty teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with 14 providing additional written comments. Thirteen support staff also completed questionnaires and five of them provided additional written comments. The staff responded positively overall and praised the work of the senior leadership team.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school. They highlighted the hard work of the staff, the excellent pastoral care system and the culture of high expectation throughout the school.

The pupils talked very positively about their experiences in school. In particular, they value the strong commitment shown by their teachers to their academic achievement and personal and social development. They are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety or well-being and reported that they were happy in school.

The very positive comments and small number of issues of concern emerging from the questionnaires and interviews have been reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate).

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The pupils are well-motivated and high expectations are set by their teachers. In addition, the pupils benefit from the strong focus on the progressive development of good personal and social skills and their behaviour is exemplary. In class, the pupils co-operate well with their teachers and, when given the opportunity, work enthusiastically and effectively in pairs and small groups.

Over the last three years, the results obtained by the pupils in public examinations at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level have shown significant improvement. In 2009, 56% of the year 12 pupils achieved grades A*-C in at least five GCSE subjects; in addition, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in at least five subjects at GCSE including English and mathematics increased from 28% in 2007 to 38% in 2009; in both cases, these results are now close to the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar non-selective schools.

There is a wide variation in the performance of individual subjects at GCSE. A minority of GCSE subjects are more than ten percentage points above the equivalent NI average but there are, however, a similar number which are more than 10 percentage points below. The school is appropriately focused on those subjects that are underperforming.

Over the past eight years, sixth-form provision has been developed and is effectively monitored to ensure a suitable match to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils. Through its involvement in the North Down and Ards Learning Community and Bangor Learning Partnership, the school is increasing the range of courses on offer. The school is developing a range of applied General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level courses that best serves its pupils.

Over the past three years, there has been success in individual subjects at GCE A-level, however, it is appropriate that the school is rigorously assessing and reviewing each subject being offered at this level in view of the respective performance by the pupils. The percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A-level grades at A-C has continued to increase from 23% in 2007 to 33% in 2009. The overall performance at GCE A-level, however, is still below the NI average for all schools.

The pupils who require additional learning support have access to a range of appropriate accreditation, including GCSEs and training. The school makes constant efforts to adapt the programme available to these pupils to ensure that they achieve to the best of their ability. The majority of the pupils achieve well; there is evidence that pupils who require additional support with their learning are well prepared for their life beyond school.

More details of the examination results can be found in Appendix 3.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of the learning and teaching was good or better in more than two-thirds of the lessons observed; a small number of the lessons were outstanding. The very good or outstanding lessons observed were characterised by a clear structure with a good focus on learning outcomes; skilful questioning developed and extended the pupils' responses through activities which challenged their thinking and empowered them to attain high

standards. Further, the most successful lessons often made effective and imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote learning. The school is promoting more active forms of learning, currently elements of these are having a very beneficial impact on the pupils in a few subjects.

The pupils who require additional support with their learning are fully included in most of the lessons. There are useful individual education plans (IEPs) to guide the learning and teaching activities. The targets within the plans are too generic and need to be adapted more for each subject; a minority of subject areas have begun to adapt their planning for differentiated teaching through judicious use of modified IEPs. The school has recognised that this continues to be an area for further staff development.

More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2.1 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. This is displayed by the strong inclusive, caring and supportive ethos, the outstanding leadership of those leading the pastoral curriculum including the learning guidance forum, the positive contribution made by the senior pupils to the mentoring initiatives, and the effective links with external agencies in supporting the needs of pupils.

2.2.2 CHILD PROTECTION

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

2.2.3 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, *Chef of the Week* and *Switch to Water* campaigns, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.2.4 INCLUSION

There is a high level of commitment by the school and the senior leadership team to the inclusion and the education of all pupils, in line with the school's ethos. The well-qualified learning support staff provide a flexible and appropriate programme of withdrawal and in-class support according to the needs of the pupil at a particular stage of learning. The effective team of classroom assistants is a feature of the school. This resource could be used to greater advantage through more careful planning of their use by subject teachers.

The school has shown commitment and pastoral care to those pupils at risk of marginalisation. For those pupils who are educated off-site there is regular contact, an effort to re-integrate them into the school and to provide an appropriate education that will meet their needs and increase their opportunities for employment and life chances.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Since his appointment in 2004, the Principal has provided clear and very effective leadership and management, based on his knowledge of and vision for the school; he demonstrates a very caring commitment for the pastoral and academic needs of the pupils. In key areas, he has successfully managed change ensuring that the whole school community is focused on improvement; as a result, there have been significant improvements in standards and there is a strong culture of high expectation in the pursuit of higher attainment. The Principal is

ably supported by an energetic and hard-working Vice-principal who is an important part of a well informed senior leadership team. In addition to this team, the school is developing a middle management structure through an effective programme of training which includes mentoring and skills development. The Principal and senior leadership team are promoting a system of self-evaluation at all levels and are committed to ensuring that all staff and heads of department are accountable for the pupils in their care.

The present model of management is one of collective responsibility and distributed leadership. For example, in harnessing the experience, enthusiasm and expertise of the staff, the school has developed a range of consultative groups including a curriculum committee, head of department forum and a learning guidance forum. Effective links have been created between the senior leadership team and all of these groups and, in addition, significant liaison takes place between the academic and pastoral heads. Further, the provision for and leadership of additional learning support has a high priority within the school.

The additional support team, led ably by a member of the senior leadership team and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), is well managed with a clear focus on providing the best possible support for those pupils who require additional support with their learning.

The leadership of the school has the full support of the governors who are actively involved in developing the senior leadership team and in clarifying roles and responsibilities.

The school's process for improvement has many strengths that are clearly linked to a school development Plan (SDP), that fully complies with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations Northern Ireland (NI) 2005 Order. In the SDP, the school has recognised the need to focus on learning and teaching and has, in addition, prioritised the need to disseminate the good practice; the inspection findings endorse this aim.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the highly motivated pupils whose behaviour is exemplary;
- the significant improvement in the achievements of the pupils in public examinations in recent years;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in more than two-thirds of the lessons observed;
- the outstanding pastoral care evidenced by the strong inclusive, caring and supportive ethos and the quality of working relationships at all levels;
- the commitment by the school and the senior leadership team to the inclusion and education of all pupils in line with the school's ethos; and
- the very effective leadership of the Principal who has a very clear focus on improvement for all of the pupils and who is ably supported by a dedicated and effective Vice-principal and senior leadership team.

3.2 The area for development, as already identified by the senior leadership team, is:

- to continue to focus on the improvement of learning and teaching.

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 educational provision and outstanding pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated its capacity to address.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the area for improvement.

It will be important that the employing authority, governors and the Principal and management team, manage issues related to the sustainability of the sixth form provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECTS UNDER FOCUS**English**

The overall provision for English is good.

The strengths include:

- the quality of the teaching observed, a majority of which was good or very good;
- the teachers' commitment, care and learning support for all the pupils, particularly those who require additional help with their work;
- the well motivated pupils, who were able to work collaboratively and independently;
- the good standards of writing in all classes observed and the importance placed on monitoring and maintaining high standards of written presentation;
- the priority given to raising literacy standards across the school; and
- the use of available performance data to inform the work of the department.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- refine the monitoring, evaluation and review processes in order to raise standards further.

Mathematics

The overall provision for mathematics is good.

The strengths of the provision include:

- the recent improvement in the standards achieved in mathematics at Key stage 3 and GCSE;
- the hard-working teachers of mathematics who work effectively as a team;
- the good or very good teaching in almost two thirds of the lessons observed;
- the excellent working relationships, in almost all of the lessons observed, which support and encourage the pupils;
- the very good start made to the monitoring and evaluating of the pupils' learning experiences and the standards they achieve; and
- the effective leadership of the head of department and her commitment to the continued improvement of the mathematics provision

The area for improvement is the need:

- to extend the pupils' enjoyment of mathematics through the further development of innovative investigative work.

Science

Overall, the provision for science is satisfactory.

The strengths include:

- the very good teaching observed in just over one-third of the lessons, characterised by the effective use of learning intentions and associated success criteria to focus lessons, the frequent experimental work, and the pupils' active involvement in and evident enjoyment of their work;
- the effective coverage of scientific knowledge and content in the written schemes of work and in the teaching observed;
- the analysis of results achieved in public examinations and the comparison of these to NI averages for similar schools which was used to draw up appropriate priorities for improvement;
- the regular marking of tests and homework which, in the best practice, provided useful written feedback for the pupils, allowing them to improve; and
- the good standards achieved by the majority of pupils.

The areas for improvement are:

- the need to raise the standards of achievement for a minority of the pupils, including the standards attained in public examinations; and
- the need to use a wider range of teaching strategies and provide the pupils with a greater range of written and other resources, focusing more strongly on the development of scientific processes and skills, and including more frequent problem-solving and decision-making tasks.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The extraction system fitted to the bandsaw in the Technology and Design workshop needs to be installed properly.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Columbanus' College
 ii. School Reference Number: 423-0107
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Roman Catholic Maintained
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 16/11/09
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 8 Intake	95	99	101	98	96
Total enrolment	519	524	545	542	544

1.3 Attendance

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2008/09	NI Average 2007/08
% Attendance	94	91.4	91.8	88.9	91.4	94.8	91.1	92	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:

40

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

0.633

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

13.94

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	51	45	50	57	48	16	7	274
Enrolment: Girls	45	50	48	37	50	24	16	270
Enrolment: Total	96	95	98	94	98	40	23	544
PTR	15.36	15.44	15.68	11.82	12.94	16.04	9.85	

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

Year 13	31.5	NI Av Year 13	40.9
Year 14	26.3	NI Av Year 14	N/A

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	65		36	
Another School	14%	11.3	3%	1.7
Employment	12%	8.7	11%	18.6
Full-time Further Education	31%	41.8	14%	22.4
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	50%	42.8
Full-time Training	34%	30.3	3%	4.9
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	5%	4.4	17%	5.6
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	5%	3.5	3%	4

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Columbanus' College, Bangor

SCHOOL YEAR: 2009/2010

GCSE	2007	2008	2009
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	98.91	98.85	92.05
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	42.39	47.13	55.56
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	28.26	36.78	38.27
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	88.04	78.16	80.25
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2007	2008	2009
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	23.08	33.33	33.33
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	94.44	91.3

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2009, 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 and Design Double Award ICT Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment History		Business Studies English Geography Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Sport/PE Studies	Biology Drama Home Economics Religious Studies Technology and Design	French Media Film and TV Studies Learning for Life and Work Music Single Award Science
GCSE A*-E	GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment	History Home Economics Motor Vehicle Studies	Art and Design Biology Double Award Science 1 st Subject Drama English English Literature French Geography Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design	Business Studies	Music
GCE A Level A-E			Geography Health and Social Care ICT Moving Image Arts Religious Studies		English Literature Sport/PE Studies

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 and Design Information Technology Music Drama	English Literature Home Economics Child Development Double Award Science 1 st Subject Biology	Business Studies Design and Technology English French Geography GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment History Home Economics Media Film and TV Studies Motor Vehicle Studies Mathematics Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	English Literature Double Award Science 1 st Subject	Art and Design Biology Drama English French History Home Economics Child Development Home Economics Information Technology Media Film and TV Studies Music Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies Design and Technology Geography GNVQ Construction and the Built Environment Mathematics Single Award Science	Motor Vehicle Studies	
GCE A Level A-E	Geography Religious Studies English Literature Sport/PE Studies				

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