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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**St Louis Grammar School
Ballymena**

Inspected: March 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Louis Grammar School is a co-educational voluntary grammar school, situated in the town of Ballymena. The school draws its pupils from the town and a wide surrounding rural area. In recent years, the enrolment has remained steady; 4% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. Over the last three years, 58% of the pupils entering the school achieved an A grade in the Transfer Procedure. The school has identified 16 pupils as being in need of additional support with aspects of 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 inspected as was the school's general approach to promoting healthy eating. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed lessons in a range of other subjects.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS

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 governors and groups of pupils from years 8, 12 and the sixth form.

One hundred and ninety questionnaires were issued to parents; 42% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 47 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were positive in their support of the work of the school. In particular, the parents commented on the high standing of the school in the community, the caring family ethos, and the quality of the induction arrangements for the new pupils.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school, highlighting the very good pastoral support of the pupils and the important role the school plays in improving community relations in the town of Ballymena.

Approximately 55% of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with 12 teachers providing additional written comments. In the main, the responses were positive, highlighting the effective working relationships between staff and pupils. A minority of teachers expressed concerns relating to the effectiveness of communication between the staff and the senior management team (SMT).

In discussions, the pupils talked enthusiastically about the pastoral and academic support they receive from teachers and the opportunities to develop their interests in music and sport. They reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

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

1.4 PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which implement fully 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's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has important strengths. Attention is paid to the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity programmes. For example, the health and well-being audit, healthy eating workshops and 'Chef of the Week' initiatives, encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is a need to place a stronger focus on the monitoring and evaluation of efforts to bench-mark and identify progress with ongoing food-related health initiatives.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS

The school offers 20 subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. In 2007, 95% of the pupils achieved grades A*-C in at least seven GCSE subjects, which is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools. Over the last three years, in a majority of subjects, the GCSE standards at grades A*-C were close to the corresponding NI averages; a significant minority of subjects were more than five percentage points below the NI average for similar schools.

The school offers 24 subjects at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level. The results obtained are very good. In 2007, 75% of pupils obtained grades A-C in at least three subjects, which is well above the NI average for similar schools. Over the last three years, the GCE A level standards, at grades A-C, in a majority of subjects were more than five percentage points above the corresponding NI averages, with a significant minority of subjects more than ten percentage points above the NI average.

The school makes some use of data on external examinations to monitor and evaluate the pupils' progress; for example, the Heads of Departments compare their GCE A level and GCSE results with NI averages for similar selective schools. The school has identified the need to extend the use of performance data to set targets for individual pupils and to improve results across the school. The inspection confirms that a more rigorous approach to target-setting is required to promote improvement and realise the pupils' full potential.

More details about the examination results are provided in Appendix 4.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of most of the teaching observed was sound or better; in a small number of lessons the teaching was excellent. In the best practice, practical activities and active learning tasks engaged and motivated the pupils and promoted independence in their learning. In contrast, a minority of lessons were over-directed by the teacher and were characterised by a lack of variety of teaching approaches; as a consequence the pupils had too few opportunities to develop their understanding and skills.

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

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal has worked effectively to develop a wider range of learning opportunities for the pupils, in co-operation with other schools and educational organisations in the Ballymena area. He is highly committed to the welfare and education of the pupils and works hard to extend the opportunities for learners in response to their needs, interests and capabilities.

The school is currently experiencing a period of significant change in staffing; seven new Heads of Department have been appointed and 15 new teachers have joined the staff in the last three years. In addition, the SMT has been strengthened by the inclusion of new members. The SMT has demonstrated its capacity to promote improvement by for example, expanding the vision of staff and pupils in building contacts locally and internationally, and through the effective arrangements for the induction and early professional development of beginning teachers.

The school development plan (SDP) does not meet the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and needs to be amended, setting out clear and appropriate priorities for improvement. These priorities will need to be underpinned by detailed action plans that support whole-school targets to improve learning and teaching and departmental plans which complement the overall SDP. In doing so, it will be important that the school develops a more strategic approach by the Principal, SMT and middle management to monitor effectively the school's improvement priorities and their impact on the pupils' attainment.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the caring, supportive and spiritual ethos;
- the quality of the arrangements for the induction of new pupils;
- the effective pastoral leadership of the Principal;
- the good standards achieved in the public examinations;
- the quality of most of the teaching observed; and

- the quality of the personal and social education programme, and the effective links established with the local and international community to promote the pupils' personal and social development.

3.2 The main areas for development include the need:

- to develop an effective SDP that identifies key priorities which promote consistent improvements in the pupils' learning; and
- to develop strategic leadership at all levels to monitor and evaluate the progress made in meeting the priorities for improvement agreed in the SDP.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

4.2 The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Pastoral Care

The strengths of the work include:

- the caring and supportive ethos;
- the courteous, well-behaved and responsive pupils;
- the recent and relevant improvements made to the Personal Development Programme;
- the contribution made by the Vice-principal and key pastoral staff to the welfare of the pupils; and
- the effective induction programme for year 8 pupils.

English Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the dedication and commitment of all of the teachers;
- the teaching, almost all of which is sound, and the majority of which is good or better;
- the attainment of the majority of pupils, especially in talking and listening; and
- the good start made by the new Head of Department to reviewing policies and schemes of work.

The areas for development include the need:

- to develop and share practices amongst all teachers across the key stages;
- to develop consistency in approaches to assessment for learning at key stage (KS) 3; and
- to review the school's provision for English and English Literature at KS4.

Science Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the high standards achieved in public examinations;

- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the good or better quality of the teaching and practical work in the sessions observed;
- the good use of internal and external data to monitor and evaluate the pupils' progress and attainment; and
- the well-organised individual science departments.

The area for development includes the need:

- to review the roles and responsibilities in the science area of learning to ensure there is more effective co-ordination of the provision.

Mathematics Department

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships that exist between pupils and teachers;
- the standards achieved by the pupils, particularly at GCSE and GCE A level;
- the individual support that is provided to pupils during mathematics lessons; and
- the energy and commitment of the teachers within the mathematics department.

The areas for development include the need:

- to develop further effective teaching strategies that will actively engage the pupils and promote mathematical thinking and problem solving;
- to make effective use of available data in order to set targets for individual pupils and at department level; and
- to monitor and evaluate more rigorously the outcomes of the department's work on improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation, in general, is not in line with the requirements of the DE building handbook; this impacts negatively on the quality of the pupils' learning experiences.
- The specialist accommodation for home economics has serious deficiencies which are impacting negatively on the quality of the pupils' learning experiences.
- The school's toilet facilities are in need of refurbishment.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is an urgent need to carry out a health and safety risk assessment of the convent building where some teaching occurs; entrances are not secured adequately.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Louis Grammar, Ballymena v. Date of Inspection: W/C 03.03.08
 ii. School Reference Number: 342-0010 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	147	139	142	144	135
Total enrolment	961	960	953	946	959

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	95.9	94.6	94.6	93.1	95.2	95	93.5	95	95

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

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	57	65	70	75	71	62	40	440
Enrolment: Girls	78	78	76	70	73	68	76	519
Enrolment: Total	135	143	146	145	144	130	116	959
PTR	15.82	16.91	16.61	15.33	14.63	13.31	12.81	

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

Year 13	80.6	NI Av Year 13	88.8
Year 14	73.6	NI Av Year 14	85.0

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2005/06	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	34		128	
Another School	6	17.2%	1	1%
Employment	0	4.3%	2	4.6%
Full-time Further Education	22	58.5%	5	9.8%
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	114	80.8%
Full-time Training	5	15.4%	1	1.1%
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0	0.9%	1	0.9%
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	1	3.8%	4	1.8%

APPENDIX 4

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Louis Grammar School,
Ballymena

SCHOOL YEAR: 2007/2008

GCSE	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	99	99	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	90	91	95
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	94	97	97
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	77	85	75
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	96	100	98

APPENDIX 5

Table 1 showing GCSE and subject results over the previous 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			Additional Mathematics Design and Technology Double Award Science Drama English English Literature Geography Information Technology Irish Learning for life and work Mathematics Music Religious Studies Sport/PE studies	Art and Design German Home Economics Single Award Science	French History

GCE A Level A-C	Chemistry Economics Home Economics Music Psychology Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Art and Design Classical Civilisation Design and Technology Drama English Literature German History Irish Mathematics	Biology Business Studies French Geography Information Technology Physics		
GCE A Level A-E		Psychology	Art and Design Biology Business Studies Chemistry Classical Civilisation Design and Technology Drama Economics English Literature French Geography German History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music Physics Religious Studies 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 Drama English Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Design and Technology Double Award Science English Literature French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Learning for life and work Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	German Single Award Science		

GCE A Level A-C		Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography German History Irish Mathematics Music Religious Studies	Biology Chemistry Classical Civilisation Design and Technology Economics Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sport/PE Studies		Psychology
GCE A Level A-E	Art and Design Biology Business Studies Chemistry Classical Civilisation Design and Technology Drama Economics English Literature French Geography German History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Mathematics Music Physics Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Psychology			

Table 3

2007 GCE A Level	% A-C	% A-E	Total Entry
Applied ICT	100	100	8
Applied Health and Social Care	92.9	100	14

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