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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**

**Victoria College  
Belfast**

**Inspected: October 2009**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK	2
3.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	3
4.	SPECIALIST SCHOOLS' PROGRAMME	4
5.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	4
	APPENDICES	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. CONTEXT

Victoria College is an interdenominational voluntary grammar school for girls. The college is located on an extensive and attractive split site in South Belfast and offers pre-school, preparatory, secondary and boarding provision for girls aged from three to 18 years. The pupils in years 8 and 9 are taught in the Richmond Campus, less than one mile from the main Cranmore Campus.

The enrolment for the school in 2009 is 864; 47 of these pupils are boarders. At the time of the inspection, a majority of the pupils in years 8 to 12 had obtained a grade A or B in the Transfer Procedure. The college has identified 20% of the pupils who require additional support in 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 seventy four questionnaires were issued to parents; 23% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 22 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were mostly highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the work and life of the college. In particular, the parents mentioned the excellent pastoral care, the committed, approachable and supportive teachers, the high standards attained by the pupils and the many opportunities the college provides to develop the pupils' personal and social skills.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the college. They highlighted their value and appreciation of the commitment and dedication of the Principal and the staff, the inclusive ethos within the college and the collaborative links established with the local and international community. They expressed concerns regarding the management of a split site and accommodation issues within the college.

Approximately two-thirds of the teachers and nine support staff completed confidential online questionnaires with eleven providing additional written comments. The staff commented positively on a range of issues including, the value they place on working in the college, the support given to pupils with special educational needs (SEN), the quality of the professional relationships between the staff and the pupils and the college's standing in the local community. A minority of the responses expressed concerns relating to the quality of communication and to general issues concerning staff well-being. The main elements of these are dealt with in the body of the report.

In discussions held with the pupils, they talked enthusiastically about the support provided by their teachers. They reported that they feel safe in the college and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns.

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

### 1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on learning and teaching, and leadership and management at all levels and, in addition, on the provision for science, history, modern languages and Latin. The college's provision for pastoral care and SEN, and the arrangements for child protection, were also evaluated, as well as the college'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 April 2009, the school was selected to take part in the Specialist Schools' Programme, beginning in September 2009. The programme aims to develop the concept of specialist schools tailored to meet the particular needs of Northern Ireland's (NI) education system. As part of the inspection, the college's provision for their specialist status in science 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

The pupils engage well in, and talk confidently about their learning. They can work collaboratively and demonstrate excellent personal and social skills. The college has introduced a range of appropriate applied qualifications at key stage (KS) 4 to meet the needs and interests of the pupils and has established effective links with other educational partners to enhance and enrich the learning and teaching experiences within a broad and balanced curriculum.

At General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level during the period 2007-09 the overall percentage of pupils attaining grades A-C in at least three subjects is above the corresponding NI average for selective schools. In 2009 most subjects are within or above five percentage points and a minority of subjects are ten percentage points above.

Over the past three years the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in seven or more subjects including English and mathematics at General Certificate of Education (GCSE) is above the NI average for selective schools. At A\*-C most subjects are within or above five percentage points of the NI average. When similar comparisons are made at A\*-B there is a wider variation in the results; a significant minority of the subjects remain five percentage points or more below the corresponding NI average.

The senior leadership team (SLT) has identified appropriately the need to address the variation in achievement at KS 4 and, in particular, to improve the standards achieved by the pupils at A\*-B. A key feature of this improvement strategy is the mentoring support programme, including the appointment of an additional member of staff to support the pupils in their learning.

### 2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The teachers are hard-working, prepare thoroughly for lessons, and have established good professional relationships with the pupils. In a significant minority of the lessons observed the quality of the teaching ranged from very good to outstanding. In the best practice observed, the lessons were well-structured and paced; the teachers used Information and Communications Technology (ICT) effectively to support and enhance the learning, made

the lesson content relevant to the pupils and there were well-planned plenary sessions to reinforce and evaluate aspects of the pupils' learning. In the less effective practice there was over-direction by the teacher and the range of teaching strategies and resources did not differentiate sufficiently to support all of the pupils.

### 2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the college is outstanding. This is displayed through the inclusive ethos, the effective support given by the Deputy Head, Assistant Principals and the pastoral team to the pupils and the quality of the professional relationships at all levels. The college provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including those with a national and international dimension, and opportunities for the pupils to develop leadership skills, and to hold positions of responsibility.

### 2.4 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

The college has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

### 2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The college gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through both curricular and extra-curricular provision.

## 3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Principal has been in post since September 2005 and provides highly effective and perceptive leadership. Since taking up appointment, she has established a clear and strategic vision for the college and has planned and implemented a new leadership system to take forward the identified strategic development priorities. She is supported most ably by a Deputy Head and four Assistant Principals. In consultation with the governors, teaching staff, parents and pupils, the SLT has made good use of wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative management information to inform college development planning which meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. An appropriate priority which the college has identified and is addressing is that of supporting staff well-being. The SLT carries out its functions in an atmosphere of mutual support; this collegiate approach draws effectively on the collective and individual strengths of the team and its members.

There is a clear commitment by the middle managers, with whom discussions were held during the inspection, to the ongoing development of the life and work of the college. A professional development programme for middle managers has been planned and implemented between partner schools within the South Belfast Area Learning Community; there is evidence that participating staff from the college have benefited from this collaborative opportunity. The SLT needs to continue to support the professional development of middle management, in particular, the heads of subjects, to enable them to implement the school improvement process. In addition, as identified appropriately in the college development plan, the SLT needs to address further the challenge of ensuring effective communication across the college.

The college deploys its financial resources efficiently and effectively, providing pupils with a suitable curriculum. The college is making very effective use of all available resources and in doing so, provides good value for money.

The governors are fully involved in and committed to the strategic planning and policy development for the college.

#### **4. SPECIALIST SCHOOLS' PROGRAMME**

In April 2009, the college was accepted onto a modified two year Specialist Schools' Programme to commence in September 2009. The college has recognised the need to review and to modify its original targets to address the new circumstances related to Specialist School status. In order to demonstrate improvement within the science specialism more clearly this review should include a revision of the targets identified for the specialist subjects which are currently overly ambitious, and indicate further how the strengths in the science specialism have the potential to promote quality learning and teaching throughout the school.

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

#### **5. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

5.1 The main strengths of the college include:

- the good standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations at post-16;
- the outstanding quality of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the quality of the teaching which ranged from very good to outstanding in a significant minority of the lessons observed;
- the effective integration of ICT to support learning and teaching;
- the successful collaboration with other educational partners to enhance and enrich the learning and teaching experiences within the broad and balanced curriculum provided for the pupils; and
- the highly effective and perceptive leadership of the Principal, ably supported by the SLT, who has identified appropriate actions to promote improvement.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- raise further the standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE A\*-B;
- broaden the range of teaching strategies and resources to meet more effectively the needs of all of the pupils; and
- continue to support the professional development of middle management, to enable them to implement the school improvement process.

#### **CONCLUSION**

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

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE SUBJECT AREAS UNDER FOCUS**

**History**

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations at post-16;
- the positive working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the committed and hardworking teachers;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the effective use of ICT to support learning; and
- the leadership of the head of subject and the commitment of the department to improvement.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- raise the standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE level, as identified by the department; and
- provide greater challenge at KS 3 in order to develop further the pupils' historical skills.

**Modern Languages**

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations at post-16;
- the positive working relationships between the hard-working staff and the pupils;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the effective use of ICT, to support the pupils' learning;
- the range of languages which the school offers, including Latin, and the additional language experiences; and
- the effective leadership of the co-ordinator of modern languages in beginning to develop, along with colleagues, a good sense of teamwork to promote improvement.

The areas for development include the need to:

- raise the standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE level; and

- meet more effectively the needs of all of the pupils.

## **Latin**

The strengths of the work include:

- the outstanding quality of the teaching which engages the pupils' interest;
- the effective use of resources and ICT which make the language and the culture relevant to the pupils and to other subjects; and
- the positive response from the pupils and their application to, and the discipline within the subject, which provide good transferable skills to other areas of study.

## **Science**

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations at post-16;
- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the overall quality of the teaching which was always satisfactory, and in the majority of the lessons observed was good or better;
- the extent to which the teachers have made a useful start to the integration of ICT into their lessons;
- the opportunities provided for the pupils to engage in practical activities which help them to consolidate and develop their knowledge and understanding of science; and
- the good start made in the evaluation of the overall quality of the provision within science by the heads of Department.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- raise the standards achieved by the pupils in GCSE at grades A\*- B, particularly in biology which is the course followed by the majority of the pupils; and
- broaden the range of teaching strategies and resources in order to engage the pupils more actively in their own learning.

### **Science: Health and Safety**

The need to review the content and scope of risk assessments for the management of practical activities.



**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

There is a need to continue to monitor and review the management of the split site.

**ACCOMMODATION**

A major capital project to provide new extensions and refurbishment of existing buildings to accommodate Victoria College on the Cranmore Campus is at an advanced stage of planning.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Victoria College v. Date of Inspection: W/C 5/10/2009  
 ii. School Reference Number: 1420264vi. Area of Study: Standard and Specialist  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18 Schools' Baseline  
 iv. Status: Voluntary

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 8 Intake	132	130	130	131	131
Total enrolment	872	867	870	864	864

1.3 Attendance

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2008/09	NI Average 2007/08
% Attendance	96.3	95.4	92.2	94.1	93.3	93.1	94.1	94	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 60.08      iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.75
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.38      iv. Number of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused only) 24

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrolment: Girls	131	133	126	127	129	111	107	864
Enrolment: Total	131	133	126	127	129	111	107	864
PTR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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

Year 13	78.9	NI Av Year 13	91.1
Year 14	82.5	NI Av Year 14	86.3

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	23		112	
Another School	43%	20.5	1%	0.9
Employment	0%	5.5	5%	4.8
Full-time Further Education	57%	58.6	7%	7.5
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	86%	83.5
Full-time Training	0%	9.6	0%	0.6
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.4	0%	1.2
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	4.5	1%	1.4

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Victoria College

SCHOOL YEAR: 2009/2010

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	98.47	99.22
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	96.94	92.37	92.16
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	99.22	94.66	96.09
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	73.83	83.13	78.95
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	81.31	95.32	95.61

EXAMINATION RESULTS

*Table showing the GCSE and GCE A Level results A-C over the previous three years ending in June 2009, in comparison with the respective NI averages for 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*-B	Home Economics		Additional Mathematics Arabic* Art & Design Chemistry Chinese* Design and Technology Drama German Italian * Music Physics Spanish	Business Studies Double Award Science 1st Subject** English English Literature Geography History Information Technology Mathematics	Biology French Sport/PE Studies

GCSE A*-C	Home Economics	German Latin*	Additional Mathematics Arabic* Art & Design Biology Chemistry Chinese* Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject** Drama English English Literature Geography History Information Technology Mathematics Music Physics	Business Studies French Italian Spanish	Sport/PE Studies
GCE A Level A-C	Classical Civilisation*** D&T: Product Design Home Economics*** Information Technology Latin*** Music*** Physics	Art & Design Biology Drama*** French History Politics Religious Studies	Chemistry Chinese*** English Literature Geography German*** History of Art and Design*** Italian* Mathematics Spanish***	Business Studies	

\* Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 over three years

\*\* Denotes a 2007 subject entry only.

\*\*\* Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 20 over three years.

**Table showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.**

**Table 2**

	<b>100% - 96%</b>	<b>95% - 86%</b>	<b>85% - 76%</b>	<b>75% - 66%</b>	<b>65% - 0%</b>
GCSE A*-B	Arabic Chinese	Drama English Information Technology Music Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Additional Mathematics Art and Design Biology Chemistry Design and Technology English Literature Geography History Latin Mathematics Physics	Business Studies Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject French German Italian Spanish	Home Economics Food
GCSE A*-C	Arabic Art and Design Biology Chemistry Chinese Drama English English Literature Greek Information Technology Italian Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Business Studies Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject French Geography German History Home Economics Latin Physics Religious Studies Spanish Sport/PE Studies			

<p>GCE A Level A-C</p>	<p>Chinese Italian</p>	<p>Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography German History History of Art and Design Mathematics Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish</p>	<p>Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Home Economics Information Technology Latin Physics</p>	<p>Design and Technology: Product Design</p>	
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