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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

**St Dominic's High School  
Belfast**

**Inspected: April 2005**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Dominic's High School is located on the Falls Road in west Belfast. The current enrolment is 983. Just over 19% of the pupils are entitled to receive free school meals. Almost 42% of pupils who transfer at year 8 have achieved a Grade A at transfer.

1.1.1 The inspection focused on the English area of study and the school's arrangements for pastoral care including child protection.

## 1.2 RESPONSES FROM GOVERNORS, PARENTS AND PUPILS

1.2.1 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the completion of questionnaires by a sample of parents as well as meetings with the Board of Governors (BoG) and groups of pupils. Prior to the inspection, the parents of 201 pupils were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire on the school. Almost 35% of the parents responded to the questionnaire, with just over 41% of them taking the opportunity to write additional comments. The responses from the questionnaires and the comments from the governors indicated that the parents and the governors regard highly the distinctive ethos of the school which they feel enriches the quality of the pupils' experiences.

1.2.2 In the course of the inspection and in addition to reading the school's wide range of documentation relating to its pastoral arrangements, the members of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) met with representatives of the BoG to hear their views on the work of the school; they held discussions with small groups of pupils from years 8, 10 and 14 and with the Principal, the head of pastoral care in the school, and a cross section of members of staff who hold specific pastoral care responsibilities in the school.

1.2.3 The school is implementing the procedures in the Department of Education (DE) Circular 1999/10, 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection', and Circular 2003/13, 'Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order'. The school has compiled a range of relevant and pertinent documentation on the provision for pastoral care and child protection. The staff have received appropriate training, and the school has provided the parents with a summary of the arrangements for child protection in the school. The good quality of pastoral care is a significant feature of the school's work and makes a valuable contribution to promoting an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning. Pastoral care systems are well-developed and communicated to staff to ensure a commonality of approach, and a school environment in which the welfare of the pupils is addressed. The pupils express confidence that the staff will respond sympathetically and appropriately to their concerns. Good efforts are made to create positive partnerships with parents and relevant support agencies.

1.2.4 A Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme is taught by the form tutors in years 8 to 14, with 35 minute sessions timetabled on alternate Wednesday afternoons. The PSHE programme is responsive to the developing needs of the pupils and addresses issues including drugs education, various aspects of health education and effectively uses outside agencies to complement the taught PSHE programme. This programme is co-ordinated by the Year Heads with evidence of progression throughout the key stages. The Inspectorate concur with the school management team's (SMT) view that the time commitment given to PSHE should be an area for development.

## 1.3 EXAMINATION RESULTS

1.3.1 In recent years, the results obtained by the pupils in public examinations have been, at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level, for ten subjects within five percentage points of the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) average for selective schools. Other subjects fall between five and ten percentage points below the corresponding average for selective schools, with five subjects more than ten percentage points below the norm. Over the previous three years, in less than half of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level subjects, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A-C was better than, or within five percentage points of, the respective NI average in selective schools. More details about the results in each GCSE subject are provided in Appendix 2.

## 2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 There is an orderly and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school. In the main, the pupils' behaviour is excellent; they are courteous and friendly towards visitors. Working relationships at all levels are very good; the pupils are treated with respect and in turn display respect for their teachers. The displays of work in the English classrooms create an interesting and stimulating learning environment. Despite their age and nature, the buildings are well maintained; the standard of caretaking is good.

2.2 The teachers prepare well for their lessons and all display a high level of expertise in their subject. The quality of teaching is always good; in a significant majority of lessons observed the teaching was excellent. In the best practice observed the teachers identified clearly the learning intentions, questioning was used skilfully throughout the lesson and particularly at the end to consolidate the learning. The pace of the lesson was brisk and purposeful. In a small number of lessons, the work was over-directed by the teacher and inadequate opportunities existed for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

2.3 All pupils sit the GCSE examinations in English and English Literature. At GCE A level there are currently large numbers taking both AS and A2 level.

2.4 English lessons are generally enjoyable and friendly. The pupils co-operate willingly with their teachers. In many of the lessons observed there were good opportunities for paired and group discussion among the pupils. The pupils were confident and relaxed when reporting back to the whole class. The girls in year 14 demonstrated the high quality of their oral skills with presentations relating to their texts being studied. On other occasions pupils would have benefited from more time to reflect on questions and produce extended responses, especially to greater open-ended questioning.

2.5 Good emphasis is placed on helping the pupils to become better readers. A wide range of interesting and challenging literature is available and a variety of resources helps support the work of the text being taught. There are currently three libraries in the school; one caters solely for year 8 pupils, another is for the middle school and the third co-exists as a study hall for the seniors. The year 8 pupils receive a Library/Information Skills class once a week. The Library Co-ordinator works very effectively with two full-time library assistants to ensure that each library is stocked with a useful selection of age-appropriate, cross-curricular texts and periodicals. In the senior library, students also have access to language tapes, video material, CD-ROMs and the Internet. All three libraries have an electronic system for lending out books and this allows the library staff to monitor borrowing patterns;

in junior school, in particular, there has been an upward trend in borrowing. There is also a library club and it helpfully compiles a list of the top 100 titles which is prominently displayed offering useful information to the whole school.

2.6 The pupils undertake a variety of exciting and challenging writing tasks and are learning to write in a range of forms of composition. This range of tasks across key stages using literary and non-literary texts is helping the pupils develop and refine their craft as writers. The pupils' responses, particularly to set texts, show personal engagement; some of this work is of a high standard.

2.7 The teachers spend considerable time responding to the pupils' work, particularly at key stage (KS) 4 and post-16. This marking is useful and helps the pupils improve their writing. This good practice needs to be extended to KS3.

2.8 The pupils make good progress in English commensurate with their ability. Over the previous three years, the English and English Literature results are within 5% of the average for selective schools. At GCE A level the pupils are also within 5% of the average for selective schools.

2.9 The Literacy Co-ordinator has overseen a staff audit from which reading emerged as an area for whole-school attention. As a result of this, subject-specific spelling lists were produced to assist the pupils' learning and 'book boxes' were purchased for the English department. The co-ordinator has also been instrumental in introducing 'Progress in English' National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) testing and has made some limited use of the information and statistics that this has produced. Wider use of this material and further monitoring and evaluating are needed to ensure that all departments are aware of and are addressing pupils' literacy requirements.

2.10 The head of department (HoD) is in her first year of post. She is hard-working and committed fully to the subject of English. The HoD has produced schemes of work for years 8 and 9 and identified suitable resources to support this work. Clear targets exist for the department which the inspection fully endorses. An additional priority is the need for clear action plans to be developed to guide and monitor the work identified. It is important that the department addresses this work as a team.

### **3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

3.1 The Principal is in her fourth year in post and holds a clear and informed vision for the school. She is committed to her staff and pupils. She is ably supported by two hard-working vice-principals. During her time as Principal she has correctly identified the main focus of her work to bring about improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. She has begun work with the staff on the self-evaluation process. As part of this work the Principal has conducted an audit, undertaken class pursuits and identified areas for improvement in teaching and learning. It is important that a clear strategy exists in order to take forward this work in a coherent manner to bring about improvement.

#### 4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 There are strengths in many important aspects of the educational and pastoral provision in this school. There are also areas that require improvement if the needs of the pupils are to be met fully.

4.2 The main strengths include:

- the strong emphasis placed on promoting the pastoral care of the pupils;
- the leadership of the Principal;
- the behaviour of the pupils;
- the standards of work in English;
- the leadership of the head of department;
- the subject-specific expertise of all members of the English department.

4.3 The inspection has identified the following area for improvement:

- the senior management and staff need to adopt a more strategic approach to address, through the school and departmental plan, the issues identified in the inspection findings.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Dominic's High School, Belfast v. Date of Inspection: W/C 18.04.05  
 ii. School Reference Number: 142-0029 vi. Area of Study: English  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Year 8 Intake	147	148	146	148	145
Total enrolment	997	993	1,002	991	983

1.3 Attendance

Year 2003/04	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2003/04	NI Average 2002/03
% Attendance	95.9	95	94.5	94.1	93.8	95.2	94	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):  iv. Numbers of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused Only)

Year 2004/05	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enrolment: Girls	145	151	148	149	152	126	112	983
Enrolment: Total	145	151	148	149	152	126	112	983
PTR	15.5	16.2	16.5	14.8	15.3	14.9	12.7	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2003/04) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	83.1	NI Av	Year 13	92.1
Year 14	77.6	NI Av	Year 14	84.9

## 1.6

GCSE & GCE A2 LEVEL	2002	2003	2004
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	99	99	98
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	84	89	86
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	94	94	93
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	61	63	73
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	97	100	100

Within this report, when commenting on examination results of individual subjects, the respective CCEA average is used as a proxy for the corresponding average for all pupils in NI taking that subject.

## EXAMINATION RESULTS

*Table showing the GCSE and GCE subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2004, 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		German	Additional Mathematics, Art and Design, Business Studies, Drama, English, English Literature, History, Irish, Mathematics, Music	Biology, Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject, French, Geography, Religious Studies	Chemistry, Home Economics Child Development, Physics, Single Award Science, Spanish
GCE A-C		French, Mathematics, Physics	English Literature, Geography, Music, Politics, Spanish, Religious Studies	Art and Design, Business Studies, Irish	Biology, Chemistry, German, History, Home Economics
GCE A-E			Art and Design, Business Studies, Chemistry, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Irish, Mathematics, Music, Physics, Politics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Biology	

**Within this report when commenting on examination results of individual subjects, the respective Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment average is used as a proxy for the corresponding average for all pupils in Northern Ireland taking that subject.**



**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*-C	Art and Design, Biology, Chemistry, Drama, English, English Literature, History, Irish, Mathematics, Music	Additional Mathematics, Business Studies, Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject, French, Geography, German, Home Economics Child Development, Physics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Single Award Science		
GCE A-C		Art and Design, Business Studies, Design and Technology, English Literature, French, Further Mathematics, Geography, History, Irish, Mathematics, Music, Religious Studies, Spanish	Biology, Chemistry, Computer Studies/Computing, Economics, German, Home Economics, Physics, Politics		
GCE A-E	Art and Design, Biology, Business Studies, Computer Studies/Computing, Design and Technology, Economics, English Literature, French, Further Mathematics, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Irish, Mathematics, Music, Physics, Politics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Chemistry			

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