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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School
Belfast**

Inspected: November 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School is situated on a spacious site on the Ravenhill Road in South-east Belfast. The school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area. At the time of the inspection the enrolment was 799 pupils, approximately 4% of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 8% of the pupils who have either medical or educational needs, requiring additional support with their learning. All of pupils in year 8 obtained a grade A in the Transfer procedure.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English, chemistry and music. 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, lessons were observed in almost all 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 Board of Governors (Governors) and groups of pupils from years 8 and 12 and the sixth form.

One hundred and sixty questionnaires were issued to parents; 44% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 43 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were highly affirmative of the work of the school. In particular, the parents mentioned the caring, welcoming ethos, the committed and supportive teachers, and the many experiences provided for the pupils.

The Governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school highlighting the quality of the pastoral care, the excellent working relationships and the cohesive nature of the school.

Almost 75% of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with twenty-four providing additional written comments. Almost all highlighted strengths in the work of the school. In particular, the teachers mentioned the strong sense of teamwork, the many opportunities for professional development and the commitment of the Principal and senior leadership team to the welfare of the staff and pupils.

In discussions held with the pupils, they talked enthusiastically about the many aspects of school that they enjoy, including the wide range of extra-curricular activities. They indicated that they know who to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work or their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training 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 gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective programmes in place which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles, for example, induction meetings at the different key stages including sessions on healthy eating, participation in healthy eating competitions and promotion of drinking water.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 EXAMINATIONS AND STANDARDS

The school offers a good range of subjects at both General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced (A) level. Overall, the standards achieved by the pupils across the subjects at GCSE level are good. In 2007, around 97% of the pupils achieved grades A* to C in at least seven GCSE subjects, which is the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools.

In most subjects, the pupils' achievement at GCE A level continues to improve steadily. In 2007, around 71% of the pupils achieved grades A-C in at least three GCE A level subjects which is just below the average for similar NI selective schools. The senior leadership team has recognised the need for further progress and appropriate strategies for improvement have been identified and are being implemented; the inspection findings endorse the school's focus for ensuring greater rigour in systematic self-evaluation and improvement. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 3.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of teaching in all of the lessons observed was sound; in a majority of lessons it was consistently good or better, and in a minority of the lessons it was excellent. In the best practice, the teachers used effectively a range of appropriate strategies to engage and interest the pupils. The pupils benefit from the many opportunities to be involved actively in the learning and respond well to paired and group work. More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal has been in post since September 2006. She sets a positive tone for the work of the school and places appropriate emphasis on the pastoral and educational needs of the pupils, and on the welfare of the staff. She is ably supported by the Vice-principal and the senior leadership team who share her vision for the school. The school's development planning process has many strengths. Following a comprehensive whole school audit and

consultations with pupils, staff and parents, the school has identified a range of appropriate priorities for school improvement. These priorities are underpinned by action plans and whole school targets to improve aspects of the school's ethos, learning and teaching, including the pupils' performance in public examinations, and school management. Opportunities for the teachers' ongoing professional development are linked appropriately to the school development plan (SDP). An assessment of the nature and quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the SDP in order to comply with statutory regulations.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the strong inclusive ethos which promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect;
- the high quality of the pastoral care provision;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in a majority of the lessons observed and, in a minority of the lessons, excellent;
- the very positive response of the pupils;
- the many experiences beyond the classroom provided for the pupils to support and enhance their learning and develop their personal and social skills; and
- the very good leadership of the Principal, the Vice-principal and the senior leadership team.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is very good. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The parents/local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Pastoral Care

The strengths of the work include:

- the commitment given to establishing a very caring and supportive ethos;
- the good behaviour of the pupils in classes and circulation areas, and the systems adopted by the school to promote positive behaviour;
- the wide ranging extra-curricular provision available to the pupils;
- the dedicated and effective leadership shown at all levels to guide the work in pastoral care; and
- the quality of the policy documentation to address pastoral issues within the school.

Chemistry

The strengths of the work include:

- the good balance of practical and theoretical work, with nearly all of the pupils reaching satisfactory to good standards;
- the teaching which, in a significant minority of the classes observed, was excellent;
- the good exposition of chemistry content and knowledge by the teachers in all of the classes observed;
- the expected learning outcomes expected being displayed, explained, and assessed well by both pupils and teachers;
- the excellent quality of the departmental documentation; and
- the excellent leadership of the new head of department, with a strong sense of teamwork evident.

The area for improvement is:

- the need to develop the arrangements for self evaluation, with particular focus on using better the wide range of information already gained from monitoring and evaluation, to inform the department's priorities for development.

English

The strengths of the work include:

- the good variety of approaches to engage young people effectively with language and literature, including appropriate use of interactive and other resources, and extra-curricular activities including the Shakespeare Festival;
- the always very good and often excellent quality of the learning and teaching in the lessons observed;
- the high standards achieved by the pupils, including in public examinations; and
- the high quality of leadership in the department.

Music

The strengths of the work include:

- the promotion of enjoyment of music making for all;
- the teaching which displayed many good features and which, in a significant minority of the lessons observed, was outstanding;
- the range and relevance of the musical topics within the taught curriculum and the good quality of the extra-curricular musical activities;
- the high standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations;
- the opportunities for self and peer evaluation of all musical activities; and
- the high level of commitment and enthusiasm of the head of department, to ensure valuable musical experiences for all pupils.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Aquinas Diocesan Grammar v. Date of Inspection: W/C 26.11.07
 ii. School Reference Number: 142-0277 vi. Area of Study: Standard
 iii. Age Range: 11-17
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 8 Intake	111	117	119	116	115
Total enrolment	783	776	779	790	799

1.3 Attendance

Year 2006/07	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2006/07	NI Average 2005/06
% Attendance	97.3	96.1	96.1	94.8	96.5	97.3	95	96	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 50.98 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.722
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 15.653 iv. Numbers of Teachers involved in Area of Study: 13 (Focused Only)

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	61	62	60	66	59	48	53	409
Enrolment: Girls	54	55	61	52	56	61	51	390
Enrolment: Total	115	117	121	118	115	109	104	799
PTR	17.304	17.605	18.056	14.178	15.047	13.958	14.28	

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

Year 13	95.6	NI Av Year 13	88.8
Year 14	93.8	NI Av Year 14	85.0

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2006/076	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	10		106	
Another School	2%	17.2	0%	1
Employment	1%	4.3	4%	4.6
Full-time Further Education	3%	58.5	11%	9.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	90%	80.8
Full-time Training	0%	15.4	0%	1.1
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.9	0%	0.9
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.8	1%	1.8

APPENDIX 3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast

SCHOOL YEAR: 2007/2008

GCSE	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	95	99.12	96.52
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	99.1	100	98.26
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2005	2006	2007
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	63	68	71
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	99	98	99.35

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2007, 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		Business Studies Religious Studies	Art and Design Biology Chemistry Drama English English Literature French Geography German History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Mathematics Additional Mathematics Music Physics Double Award Science 1 st Subject Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design		

GCE A Level A-C	English Literature French German Politics	Art and Design Drama History Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies Chemistry Design and Technology Home Economics Irish Music	Geography Mathematics Sociology Spanish	Biology Computer Studies/Computing Physics
GCE A2 Level A-E			Art and Design Business Studies Chemistry Design and Technology Drama English Literature French Geography German History Home Economics Irish Mathematics Music Politics Religious Studies Sociology Spanish Sport/PE Studies		

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	Art and Design Biology Chemistry Drama English History Mathematics Music	Business Studies English Literature French Geography Home Economics Information Technology Irish Additional Mathematics Physics Religious Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject Spanish Sport/PE Studies Technology and Design			
GCE A Level A-C		Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Geography German History Irish Mathematics Music	Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Home Economics Physics Sport/PE Studies		

		Politics Religious Studies Sociology Spanish			
GCE A Level A-E	Art and Design Biology Business Studies Chemistry Computer Studies/Computing Design and Technology Drama English Literature French Geography German History Home Economics Irish Mathematics Music Physics Politics Religious Studies Sociology Spanish Sport/PE Studies				

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