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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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

Cambridge House Grammar School
Ballymena

Inspected: January 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Cambridge House Grammar School is a co-educational controlled grammar school situated in Ballymena. The school was founded in 2001 following the amalgamation of Cambridge House Boys' Grammar School and Cambridge House Grammar School for Girls on the same site. Over the past five years approximately half of the intake obtained grades A or B in the Transfer Procedure. Just under 4% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 14% of the pupils as needing additional support with 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.

Two hundred and fourteen questionnaires were issued to parents; 35% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 35 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires were highly affirmative, indicating strong support for the work and life of the school. In particular, the parents commented on the good levels of individual support that their children receive and the caring and approachable teachers.

Over half of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with 19 teachers providing additional written comments. Sixteen support staff completed a confidential questionnaire. Both sets of responses were mostly positive referring to the good working relationships, the caring ethos and the behaviour of the pupils. A minority raised concerns relating to internal communication and the adequacy of resources. The governors expressed strong support for the work of the school and the leadership of the Principal.

In discussions, the pupils talked positively about their experiences in school, they valued the pastoral and academic support provided by teachers and were complimentary about the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. All of the pupils interviewed reported that they felt safe and secure in school and they were aware of what to do if they had any concerns about their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the few other matters emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff questionnaires.

1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on learning and teaching, and leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English, history and science. The school's provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection, and the provision for pupils who need additional support with their learning was also evaluated as

well as the school'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. 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 are well motivated and, when given the opportunity, engage collaboratively in their learning through group and paired work. They display good levels of confidence and are developing a range of skills and capabilities, including very good personal and social skills.

The percentage of pupils achieving seven or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades at A*-C over the past three years, including English and mathematics, has been well below the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. At GCSE grades A*-B, most subjects are more than ten percentage points below the NI average.

Over the past three years, the pupils' achievement in General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level at grades A-C in at least three subjects has been well below the average for similar NI selective schools. Although a significant minority of subjects are within five percentage points of the NI average, a majority of subjects are more than five percentage points below.

The performance of a majority of the subjects at GCSE and GCE is improving, showing an upward trend; however, there remains a need to improve further the levels of the pupils' attainment in public examinations. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 4.

There is a wide range of subjects on offer at both GCSE and post-16 level with additional options provided by the school's collaborative arrangements through the Ballymena Learning Together partnership.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of nearly all of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to very good: a majority was good or very good; a few lessons were outstanding and a small number were inadequate. In the best practice observed, there were opportunities for the pupils to be actively engaged in their learning. These lessons were well structured with clear learning intentions and good consolidation of learning through effective plenary sessions. There was also skilful questioning that developed the pupils' thinking skills encouraging extended responses that enabled the pupils to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. In the less effective practice, too narrow a range of teaching and learning strategies was employed. In general, there is a need to develop further and more consistently throughout the school, a wider range of teaching and learning strategies that engage the pupils more actively in their learning. Teachers prepare well for lessons and there is good departmental planning. In order to meet the needs of all learners and in particular the pupils with additional learning needs, the teachers need to take greater cognisance of differentiation within their planning.

2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. This is displayed by the high level of commitment of the pastoral team to the welfare of the pupils, the positive contribution made by the senior pupils to the mentoring and monitoring initiatives, and the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are well supported by the pupils.

2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children/young people. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE. The following minor area needs to be addressed: the need to ensure that all of the remaining non-teaching staff who have not yet received child protection training complete a relevant course as soon as possible.

2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.6 PROVISION FOR PUPILS IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WITH THEIR LEARNING

Currently the school does not provide sufficiently for the small minority of pupils who need additional support with their learning. There is a need to develop better monitoring of the individual education plans and learning across subjects. The special educational needs co-ordinator needs additional time to take this action forward.

The school's capacity to ensure its commitment to those pupils at risk of marginalisation is satisfactory. The school is developing a system to help the teachers to identify early any pupil at risk of falling behind in their work or dropping out of school; for example, an education plan based on the needs and interests of an individual pupil has been developed to promote the pupil's engagement with learning.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal provides strong leadership of the school and is assisted ably by a senior leadership team (SLT) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. She displays commitment to the development, health and well-being of the pupils and has provided very good leadership through a time of considerable restructuring and change. The Principal and SLT demonstrate a clear vision for, and commitment to, school improvement. The governors play an active role in supporting and overseeing the work of the school.

The school's process for improvement has many strengths; it is linked clearly to the school development plan and associated action plans that are based appropriately upon self-evaluation and consultation. The school has given good attention to, and is working effectively towards, meeting fully the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. There is now a need to prioritise the areas for development, and make more extensive use of the available performance data, including DE benchmarking information, to review and inform further improvements in learning. The senior teacher with responsibility

for data management has started the process of collating and analysing qualitative and quantitative data. It will be important that the interpretation and dissemination of this data informs appropriately the quality of the school's provision and assists in effective target-setting in order to raise further the standards. The school is making good progress in this area.

There is a developing culture of self-evaluation at middle management level. The school has identified the need to build the capacity, and extend the monitoring and evaluating role, of middle managers in order to improve further the quality of teaching and learning. The Inspectorate confirms that this is a key priority for development.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the good working relationships between the pupils and their teachers;
- the very good pastoral care provided by the school;
- the quality of the teaching, the majority of which is good or very good;
- the effective links with a wide variety of support agencies and the ongoing links with other schools in the area;
- the good start that has been made in establishing a culture of self-evaluation within the school at all levels; and
- the very good leadership of the Principal supported ably by the SLT.

The areas for improvement identified include the need:

- to develop further the provision for the pupils who need additional support with their learning; and
- to raise expectations and improve further the standards achieved in public examinations.

5. 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 and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

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

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECT AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the quality of the teaching, most of which is satisfactory, and a significant minority of which is good to very good;
- the good start made by the department in self-evaluation and action planning; and
- the very good leadership provided by the Head of Department.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the levels of attainment in public examinations, particularly in GCSE English and GCE English Literature;
- to develop further assessment for learning and a more consistent approach towards marking and assessment, to ensure that more challenging work is provided for the most able pupils; and
- to develop a wider range of active learning strategies.

History

The strengths of the work include:

- the positive working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the reflective and hard-working teachers;
- the creative approaches to history adopted in key stage 3; and
- the leadership of the Head of Department and the commitment of the department to improving the quality of provision for learning.

The area for improvement is:

- to develop further the process of self-evaluation to focus more specifically on teaching and learning in order to raise standards.

Science

The strengths of the work include:

- the motivated and interested pupils;
- the working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the improving standards in public examinations;
- the good learning and teaching observed;
- the strategies used to promote the pupils' interest in science; and
- the good leadership at all levels within the science department.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop further self-evaluation as a vehicle to promote improvement in the provision;
- to develop further the use of available data to celebrate success and to set targets for improvement; and
- to make greater use of active learning strategies to promote the pupils' learning.

ACCOMMODATION

- There is no view pane in the door of room G13.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is open access to the playing fields at the front of the school.

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Cambridge House Grammar School, Ballymena

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

GCSE	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	98.8	99.4	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	81.6	69.3	76
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	89.3	80.7	93
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	53.5	53.5	42.1
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	86.9	91.1	89.5

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2008, 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*-B		Drama	Information Technology Spanish Statistics	Additional Mathematics Art and Design	Biology Business Studies Chemistry Double Award Science 1 st Subject English English Literature French Geography German* History Home Economics Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music Physics Religious Studies* Single Award Science Sociology Sport/PE Studies

* Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over 3 years.

GCE A Level A-C	Music*	Business Studies Media Film and TV Studies	Art and Design Geography Information Technology Religious Studies Sociology Spanish Sport/PE Studies*	Design and Technology Drama Home Economics* Mathematics Physics	Accounting/Finance* Biology Chemistry* English Literature French* Further Mathematics* History Psychology
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* Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 20 pupils over 3 years.

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*-B	Chinese	Drama Information Technology Music	Art and Design Biology Chemistry English English Literature History Home Economics Media Film and TV Studies Religious Studies Sociology Sport/PE Studies Statistics	Additional Mathematics Geography Mathematics Physics Spanish	Business Studies Double Award Science 1 st Subject French German Single Award Science
GCE A Level A-C		Art and Design Business Studies Drama English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography History Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music Religious Studies Spanish	Accounting/Finance Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Home Economics Information Technology Physics Sociology Sport/PE Studies		Psychology

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