



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
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Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Standard Inspection

**Christian Brothers' School
Belfast**

Inspected: March 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

The Christian Brothers' Secondary School is situated on the Glen Road in West Belfast. Nearly all of the pupils come from the immediate area. The levels of unemployment and social deprivation in the area are high and 43% of the pupils attending are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 33% of the pupils requiring additional support for their learning. The enrolment of the school has fallen in recent times, though the year 8 enrolment has shown a recent improvement.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels and, on the provision for English, mathematics, science and the vocational curriculum. The provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection were also inspected, as was the school's support for pupils requiring additional support for their learning. As an additional evidence base, lessons were observed in a range of other subjects.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, and the 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, and representatives from the school's student council.

One hundred and eight questionnaires were issued to the parents; 45% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and ten contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that most of the parents appreciated greatly the care and support provided for the pupils, and felt that the school is increasingly viewed very positively in the local community. A minority of parents who responded were unsure of the procedures that the school used to deal with child protection issues.

The governors expressed strongly their satisfaction with the work of the school and, in particular, the effective role of the Principal, since he took up appointment, in the improvement of standards. They also highlighted the hard work and commitment of the staff, and the excellent links with the local community.

The majority of the staff completed a confidential questionnaire, with five staff providing additional written comments. The responses were mostly very positive, showing evidence of a commitment to improvement and a dedication to the work of the school. A few responses raised matters relating to internal communication and the need to involve the pupils more in decision-making processes. In discussions, the pupils talked knowledgeably and enthusiastically about the opportunities available to them within the school, of their appreciation of the work the Principal, and of the hard-working teachers. They indicated that they knew whom to turn to if they had concerns about their work, or about personal safety or well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the few areas of concern emerging from all questionnaires and discussions, and the findings of this inspection endorse the positive views expressed and the priorities identified.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The pupils co-operated well with their teachers and, in most of the lessons observed, were motivated to complete their work and their behaviour was good. Through the recent and appropriate broadening of the school's curriculum they are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop their skills and attributes. The pupils benefit well from the strong focus on the progressive development of good personal and social skills.

Over the last three years the results obtained in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations have shown significant improvement. In 2008, the school was well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools in pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE not including English and mathematics. There is variation, however, in the performance of individual subjects; the majority of subjects are within or above five percentage points of the NI average. In a minority of subjects, achievement is more than ten percentage points below the NI average and this needs to be addressed. The school has identified the need for improvement in standards in English and mathematics at GCSE, and the inspection endorses this as a key priority.

The percentage of pupils achieving two or more A-levels at grades A-E is well below the NI average for similar schools. These are the first set of results for the new post-16 programmes of study and these courses in the school are still at an early stage of development. In addition, there is variation in the performance of individual subjects; the majority of subjects are within five percentage points of the NI average. In a minority of subjects, however, achievement is more than twenty percentage points below the NI average, and this needs to be addressed. Appropriately, the school has introduced a wide range of 13 vocational courses to meet the needs of the pupils more effectively.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendices 3 and 4.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

In almost two-thirds of the lessons observed, the quality of learning and teaching was good or better. The teachers employed a variety of teaching approaches to develop the pupils' independence and thinking skills, including the use of effective paired and group work. The commitment of the staff is reflected in the extensive staff development undertaken. In the best practice observed, the pupils had a clear understanding of the intended learning, and the teachers provided well-planned opportunities for the pupils to reflect and build upon their learning. Oral work was well managed, and, in particular, the pupils had frequent opportunities during extended oral responses to talk to and learn from each other during group work. During these sessions, pupils developed well their thinking skills, personal capabilities, and independence. In about one-fifth of the lessons, however, the pace was too slow, the lesson outcomes were unclear or were not met, and there was an overuse of work

sheets focused on the completion of very limited tasks which often drew a passive response. The inspection highlights the need to share and develop the existing very good learning and teaching strategies.

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

2.2.1 PASTORAL CARE

The pastoral work of the school is given a high priority and the provision for pastoral care is very good. This was demonstrated through the positive working relationships observed, the caring and supportive ethos, and the proactive efforts by all of the staff to help young people deal with potential barriers to learning, and the effective communication and working alongside other external agencies. To improve further the quality of the pastoral care provision, there is a need to review and update the pastoral policies, and to monitor and evaluate more effectively the impact of the wide range of pastoral care activities and provision.

2.2.2 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding young people, and these arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the DE. The following minor areas need to be addressed. The school needs a standard format for the collation of information relating to child protection matters, and needs to ensure that parents and pupils are fully aware of procedures, within the school, for dealing with this area of work.

2.2.3 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the pupils' participation in the "Create 'n' Cook" competition, and the well-conceived arrangements which ensure that the school council has discussed and had opportunities to contribute to food issues affecting the pupils. The areas for improvement include the need to ensure that all food and drink provided comply with the food-based nutritional standards, and to formalise associated monitoring and evaluation procedures as the school continues to develop healthy eating programmes.

2.2.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION

There is a strong focus on the provision for those requiring additional support with their learning. The strengths of the provision include the effective programme of staff development, an increasing acceptance of a collective responsibility to support children with special needs, and good links with support agencies. During the inspection, good support was provided in a number of classes, in withdrawal sessions, and from dedicated teaching assistants. The school identified appropriate areas for improvement including, the need for education plans to be shared with all of the staff, the improved diagnosis and testing of the particular needs of the pupils, and the improved communication with feeder primary schools; action is ongoing already to address these. There is need for the special educational needs co-ordinator to have an appropriate time allocation in which to carry out his duties, including, critically, time to monitor more systematically the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and their level of attainment. The school's intention to form a special educational needs team to take these matters forward would assist in this important work.

The school's capacity to ensure its effective commitment to those pupils at risk of marginalisation is good. The staff are good in identifying pupils at risk of falling behind or dropping out of school, and they take swift and consistent action to promote their inclusion and learning. The school gives good attention to nurturing the pupils' emotional development, providing a basis for them to learn successfully and feel included.

2.3 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal has been in post since 2004, and he provides strong and effective leadership based on a very good knowledge of the needs of the pupils and a clear vision for the school. He takes management decisions decisively and effectively. He has led the staff well in making significant improvements to the overall standards achieved, as well as addressing successfully a major budget deficit; and the trustees of the school have provided good support to the Principal on these matters. He is supported well by the senior leadership team (SLT), most of whom are recent appointments. In addition, there was a clear sense of commitment by the middle managers, with whom discussions were held during the inspection, to the ongoing development of the life and work of the school.

Under the Principal's direction, the school has developed, in an innovative manner, a wide range of vocational subjects, to meet the needs of the pupils more effectively. The major priority now is to improve the standards achieved by the pupils in literacy and numeracy which, although improving perceptibly, still need to improve significantly, as do the results attained in public examinations in a minority of subjects. Importantly, the school and the Belfast Education and Library Board need to liaise and agree some details of the targets set.

Overall, the school has made a sound start in implementing arrangements for self-evaluation leading to improvement. It makes effective use of DE benchmarking data to set appropriate targets for further improvement. Prior to the inspection, the school provided self-evaluative reports of its work in all of the subjects. This audit identified a number of appropriate areas for development, including the dissemination of the existing very good practice. There is a need for a further development of the involvement of the SLT, and the middle management, in monitoring and evaluating the provision, and ensuring, if any adjustments are needed, that they are made. The School Development Plan (SDP) meets, in most respects, the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order. There is a need to collate the various written parts required for the SDP, and to ensure that all of the staff are aware of and working to what is set out. The SDP, when collated, needs to include a succinct summary and evaluation of the information being gathered from monitoring and evaluation.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the good behaviour of the pupils;
- the quality of the learning and teaching observed which was good or better in almost two-thirds of the lessons;

- the commitment of the staff, reflected, for example, in the extensive staff development undertaken;
- the innovative development of a wide range of vocational subjects to meet the needs of the pupils more effectively;
- the very good pastoral care provision; and
- the strong and effective leadership provided by the Principal, based on a clear and appropriate vision for the school, which has resulted in recent significant improvements in standards.

3.2 The areas for improvement are the need:

- to develop the School Development planning process, including the improved monitoring and evaluation of a broader range of qualitative and quantitative information, in order to make further and necessary improvements in standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy; and
- to share and develop, across the school, more effective learning and teaching strategies which will engage and motivate all of the pupils.

4. **CONCLUSION**

The quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified as the key area for improvement, the further raising of standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy, which needs to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing this area for improvement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECTS UNDER FOCUS

English

The strengths of the provision include:

- the improving standards in key stage (KS) 4 English;
- the hard work and commitment of the teachers who know the children well;
- the quality of the teaching observed, which ranged from satisfactory to very good;
- the good behaviour in the classes observed and, when given the opportunity, the extended oral responses of the pupils; and
- the good start made by the head of Department and literacy co-ordinator, in setting targets for individual pupils in both KS3 and 4.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to review the teachers' short-term planning to focus more sharply on learning outcomes and associated success criteria, in order to improve further the standards; and
- to develop a more rigorous and systematic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the learning and teaching.

Mathematics

The strengths of the provision include:

- the good working relationships that result in good levels of behaviour and pupils' attention;
- the commitment of the teachers to the pupils as evidenced through, for example, the before and after- school support sessions;
- the effective focus on the intended learning for lessons, and the clear explanations of the mathematical concepts and skills;
- the quality of feedback by the teachers in their marking of homework, which, at its most effective, is focused appropriately on the improvement of the pupils' understanding and skills; and

- the developing leadership and management of the Department, which is leading to improvement in the quality of the provision and in the standards the pupils achieve.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop the level of questioning in order to elicit fuller responses from the pupils;
- to improve the quality of activities in order to engage the pupils in greater mathematical challenge in a minority of lessons; and
- to sustain the recent improvement in the standards.

Science

The strengths of the provision include:

- the participation in the STEP–UP to Science programme for post-16 pupils, which is raising their aspirations and expectations to progress in science;
- the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils;
- the hard work and commitment of the teachers;
- the good or better quality of the teaching in the majority of lessons observed;
- the good oral responses from the pupils; and
- the extra-curricular science opportunities provided, and the success in science competitions.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the access to, and use of, information and communication technology resources to enhance teaching, and to support the pupils' learning; and
- to improve the quality of the teachers' short-term planning and practice, to ensure that the teaching strategies employed match more closely the ability of all of the pupils.

Vocational curriculum

The strengths of the provision include:

- the strong vision and driving force provided by the SLT in the development of a range of appropriate vocational subjects to meet the needs of the pupils more effectively;

- the quality of the learning and teaching which was very good in a significant minority of the lessons observed;
- the good opportunities for real-life learning contexts;
- the good quality of pupils' responses, motivation and engagement in most of the lessons observed;
- the effective links with other schools in the local Area Learning Community, and with a further education college, to enhance the curriculum provision; and
- the good start made to self-evaluation leading to improvement by the SLT and the entitlement framework development co-ordinator.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to disseminate the existing very good practice, in order to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching is consistently good or better; and
- to develop the careers education, information, advice and guidance provision further to ensure that pupils make appropriate choices for their career pathways.

SUFFICIENCY AND CONDITION OF THE ACCOMMODATION HEALTH AND SAFETY

- A lack of specialist Home Economics accommodation results in Home Economics activities sometimes being carried out in accommodation where there are potential safety issues.
- In the changing room/shower area, the shower area needs upgraded/refurbishment.
- A disability audit highlighted the need for additional facilities.
- A recent internal school Health and Safety audit highlighted areas which the school is pursuing with the Belfast Education and Library Board, for example:
 - a. new security locks fitted to many of the doors;
 - b. repairs/replacement to roof of science and mathematics block.
- Refurbishment of staff toilets is needed.
- Technology and design accommodation needs an upgrade to resolve safety issues and conform to DE regulations.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Christian Brothers' Secondary v. Date of Inspection: W/C 09.03.09
 ii. School Reference Number: 123-0146 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Roman Catholic Maintained

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 8 Intake	93	66	45	60	78
Total enrolment	692	628	578	539	502

1.3 Attendance

Year 2007/08	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2007/08	NI Average 2006/07
% Attendance	90.1	84.8	83.8	84.9	86.5	91	86.4	87	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:

36

- iii. Contact ratio (percentage of
-
- timetabled time in direct
-
- class contact):

0.837

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

13.94

- Number of Teachers
-
- involved in Area of Study:
-
- (Focused only) 20

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	78	59	51	74	90	102	48	502
Enrolment: Total	78	59	51	74	90	102	48	502
PTR	13.43	12.92	11.22	11.41	13.58	23.29	13.39	

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

Year 13	71.0	NI Av Year 13	37.4
Year 14	26.2	NI Av Year 14	25.2

1.6 Leavers Destinations

2006/07	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	66		53	
Another School	0%	11.1	4%	2
Employment	9%	12.4	36%	19.5
Full-time Further Education	0%	37.2	15%	21
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	13%	42
Full-time Training	80%	30.1	19%	6.6
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	6%	4.1	13%	4.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	5%	4.9	0%	4.6

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Christian Brothers' Secondary School, Belfast

SCHOOL YEAR: 2008/2009

GCSE	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	88.19	97.6	77.59
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	27	34	39.32
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and mathematics	18.11	20	25.86
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	46.46	63.2	67.24
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2006	2007	2008
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	17.65	13.64	10
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	76.47	68.18	59.09

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and GCE 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*-C	Accounting/Finance Art and Design English Literature French History Irish Music	Design and Technology: Resistance Materials Double Award Science 1 st Subject	Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology Single Award Science		English Geography Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies
GCSE A*-E	Accounting/Finance French Media Film and TV Studies Music	Art and Design* History	Design and Technology: Resistance Materials Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature Irish Office Technology	Geography	English Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies Single Award Science
GCE A-E			Art and Design** History* Information Technology** Politics*		Geography** Religious Studies**

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

** 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

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A*-C				Accounting/Finance Art and Design Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature	Business Studies Design and Technology: Resistance Materials English French Geography History Irish Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Motor Vehicle Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science
GCSE A*-E		Art and Design Double Award Science 1 st Subject English English Literagure Irish Music	Accounting/Finance Business Studies Design and Technology: Resistance Materials French Geography History Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science		
GCE A-E	Art and Design Geography History Information Technology Politics Religious Studies				

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