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Department of Education  
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Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

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

**Belfast Royal Academy**

**Inspected: January 2004**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' EXPERIENCE	2
3.	MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS	4
4.	CONCLUSION	4
	APPENDICES	6

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Belfast Royal Academy is a large voluntary, co-educational, grammar school situated in North Belfast. The accommodation combines a mixture of historic and modern buildings. The school has a long tradition of serving all sections of the community, which continues to be a feature. The enrolment at the school is currently 1,407. Almost all of the pupils achieved grades A and B in the Transfer Procedure, with over 70% obtaining a grade A. The pupils come from some 50 contributory primary schools dispersed over a wide area. Around 4.5% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school has a small number of pupils with special needs arising from physical or specific learning difficulties. The average attendance is the same as for all selective schools, but the post-16 staying-on rate is significantly higher.

1.2 The Headmaster has been in post for three and a half years. The parents and the Board of Governors (BoG) alike acknowledged his openness and approachability. He has a clear vision for the school and is well supported by an experienced senior management team (SMT). He has reviewed a number of aspects of the school's provision since taking up office and has launched a number of initiatives. In order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of these, it will be necessary to create appropriate structures and procedures and delegate some of the workload.

1.3 Prior to the inspection, 285 parents were asked to complete a questionnaire on aspects of the school's provision; the return rate for this was over 48%. A significant number of the respondents added written comments. The general tone of these responses was very positive: the parents commented on the commitment and leadership of the Headmaster and senior staff, the dedication of the teachers, the cross-community character of the school enrolment and the extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Groups of pupils drawn randomly from years 8, 12 and 14 expressed similar views in discussion with the inspectors. The inspectors also had discussions with the BoG who outlined their close involvement in the life and work of the school, affirmed their confidence in the school management and staff and echoed many of the positive views of the parents and pupils. A few concerns raised by a small number of the parents were drawn to the attention of the governors and the school.

## 1.4 EXAMINATION RESULTS

In recent years, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in at least seven subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is around the median for similar selective schools in Northern Ireland (NI). At General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A-C is in the lower quartile for similar selective schools. Further details about the results for each subject are provided in Appendix 2.

## 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION AND PASTORAL CARE ARRANGEMENTS

1.5.1 The school's pastoral care procedures are in line with the guidance offered in the Department of Education (DE) Circular 1999/10 - "Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection". There is an appropriate range of policies to support the work of the school in pastoral care and the school informs the parents regularly about its policies. There is an effective system of registration teachers and form teachers through which pupils may seek

support; the members of the SMT in charge of pastoral care work closely with these teachers to keep them informed.

1.5.2 The pupils in years 10, 11 and 12 have a weekly timetabled tutorial period which consists of two modules; personal, social and health education (PSHE), including careers education, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills development. The establishment of a core team responsible to develop further and deliver the PSHE tutorial programme, by utilising fully the particular strengths, expertise and interests of individual teachers, would enhance the quality of learning and teaching of this aspect.

1.5.3 The provision for careers education and guidance has strengths in some areas which could provide a sound basis for further development of the programme. The careers curriculum would benefit from the introduction of personal career planning by pupils.

1.5.4 Written comments from many parents, and the views of the pupils expressed in discussion with the inspectors, highlighted the fact that the pupils felt happy and secure in school. In discussion and in their exchanges with visitors in the classrooms and corridors the pupils were courteous and articulate.

## 1.6 FOCUS OF THE INSPECTION

The inspection focused on the work of the modern languages department which covers French, German and Spanish.

## 2. QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' EXPERIENCE

### 2.1 THE ETHOS IN MODERN LANGUAGE LESSONS

The lessons in modern languages take place in a very pleasant atmosphere. The teachers show an interest in their pupils and there is evidence of warmth and mutual respect with moments of humour. In all of the classrooms and in the surrounding corridors there is a range of language-related material on display. This includes photographs of school language activities, maps, posters and examples of short pieces of the pupils' written work. Occasionally, this material is used well as a teaching resource.

### 2.2 DEPARTMENTAL DOCUMENTATION AND PLANNING

There is a range of documentation for the whole department and for the individual languages. The documentation offers helpful guidance on a number of issues, but does not sufficiently address important aspects of methodology. The schemes of work consist largely of topics following the sequence of the textbook without indication of the types of learning activities which might be undertaken. The pupils would benefit from a wider range of approaches than that offered by some of the exercises in the main textbook, which would provide more challenge, allow them to participate more fully in lessons and to develop all four language skills in a more meaningful way.

## 2.3 TEACHERS' PLANNING AND THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

2.3.1 Individually, the teachers are well prepared for their lessons and are conscientious. They organise well the requisite equipment and materials. Several teachers share the intended tasks clearly with the pupils at the start of the lesson and sometimes indicate the next stage of the sequence of learning for forthcoming lessons. They maintain a purposeful atmosphere in the classrooms, many teach at a lively pace and all set and mark homework regularly. Some of the marking is accompanied by comments designed to help the pupils improve their written performance. All of the teachers have a good level of competence in the languages they teach and provide good models of pronunciation. While some of the teachers use the target language extensively in conducting their lessons, others tend to rely excessively on English or to switch frequently and confusingly between the two. In order for the pupils to develop to the full their listening skills, it will be necessary for all the teachers in the department to adopt a more consistent approach to the use of the target language, in line with the department's own policy statement.

2.3.2 In the best practice, the teachers provide a meaningful context for the language tasks. They use effectively a range of visual stimuli, including video extracts, flashcards and pictures with the overhead projector to promote extended oral and written activity. In a minority of lessons the pupils were encouraged to express themselves at length. In one lesson, for example, senior pupils engaged in an energetic debate of a topical issue in the target language; in another the pupils built up an extended narrative from a series of pictures. In others, the teachers encouraged the pupils to extend the length of their answers, to paraphrase points in their own words or to deal with aspects of the class routines in the target language. Pair or group work are used effectively, with the pupils being required to report back to the rest of the class. In many lessons, in contrast, the pupils are required only to respond with single words or short phrases and many of the activities are based on simple matching of pictures and text from textbook exercises. In these instances there is insufficient emphasis on the pupils developing real communicative ability. In several lessons there is insufficient challenge for more able pupils and more thought should be given to differentiating the tasks set.

2.3.3 At present the department has limited access to ICT; the pupils undertake some word processing and use the Internet to research topics. The equipment situation is due to change significantly in the near future. It will be important for the department to discuss how best to incorporate such equipment into the teaching in order to effect improvement in the pupils' language skills.

2.3.4 The departmental planning makes no reference to the importance of extended reading. A more systematic approach to the development of reading is required. A minority of the classrooms have magazines and readers available in the target language and two have a reading corner with a good supply of modern literature.

2.3.5 Much of the pupils' written work is in the form of exercises which require a minimal response, for example, matching an item of vocabulary to a number or letter or inserting a single word to complete a sentence. The pupils should be encouraged from an early stage to compose pieces of continuous writing at an appropriate level. Consideration should be given to ways of checking the accuracy of what the pupils record in their notebooks which they use as the basis for revision.

## 2.4 THE PUPILS' RESPONSES

The pupils are motivated and attentive and respond readily to the teachers' questions. When given the opportunity, they show the ability to make more extended responses and to use the language more spontaneously. In these instances they demonstrate a good level of aural understanding, sound pronunciation and oral fluency. In pair work and group work they cooperate well and use responsibly the opportunity to practise their language. In a significant minority of the lessons, however, the opportunities for them to be actively involved in the learning are limited and their overall language competence is reduced.

## 2.5 EXAMINATION RESULTS IN MODERN LANGUAGES

At GCSE the pupils achieve results which are within five percentage points of the NI average for selective schools in French and between five and ten percentage points above the NI average for German and Spanish. At GCE A level the pupils achieve results in all three languages which are within five percentage points of the NI average for selective schools.

## 3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 There is an overall head of languages and teachers with responsibility for each of the languages. The whole department meets regularly. The accommodation for languages is good, comprising a suite of spacious and adjacent rooms and includes a departmental base and small group rooms for use by the language assistants. At present, the department is dependent on the use of a central ICT suite, but there are plans to increase the availability of ICT facilities within the department.

3.2 The school offers three languages, all of which can be taken to GCE A level. While the numbers of pupils taking GCE A level are sometimes small, a healthy proportion of the pupils takes two languages at GCSE.

3.3 The school does not currently have any partner schools abroad, but pupils have opportunities through a number of schemes for direct contact with the country of the language they are learning.

3.4 There is much potential within this young department. In order for this to be fully realised it will be necessary to encourage the teachers to engage in reflection on aspects of methodology, to monitor and evaluate the implementation of departmental policies and to disseminate the existing good practice across the department.

## 4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The strengths of the modern languages department include:

- the pleasant and often good-humoured atmosphere in many of the lessons;
- well-motivated and well-behaved pupils;
- well-organised and conscientious teachers;

- a significant minority of effectively sequenced lessons covering more than one skill;
- many lessons which are conducted at a brisk pace;
- extensive use of the target language by some teachers who explain difficult phrases in the target language, using mime, visuals, drawings and symbols to convey meaning and to assist comprehension;
- the effective use of a range of visual resources in a minority of lessons to promote extended oral use of the language and provide a stimulus to written work;
- the examination results;
- the size and disposition of the rooms within the department and the quality of several of the language displays.

#### 4.2 Areas for improvement:

- improved monitoring of the extent to which departmental policy and recommended practice are being implemented;
- the development of a greater shared understanding of what constitutes good practice, building on that already existing in the department and the dissemination of this good practice across the department;
- a more judicious choice of tasks, with less emphasis on low-level textbook exercises which involve little productive use of language.

4.3 The modern languages department has strengths in many aspects of its provision; the areas for improvement need to be addressed if it is to meet as fully as possible the needs of all the children.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Belfast Royal Academy v. Date of Inspection: W/C 26.01.04  
 ii. School Reference Number: 142-0028 vi. Area of Study: Modern Languages  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Grammar Voluntary

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Year 8 Intake	202	203	204	203	202
Total enrolment	1,398	1,397	1,412	1,412	1,407

1.3 Attendance

Year 2002/03	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2002/03	NI Average 2001/02
% Attendance	95.7	95.5	94.4	93.0	95.6	94.0	93.6	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:

Year 2003/04	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	94	104	123	97	100	84	81	683
Enrolment: Girls	108	104	84	113	104	109	102	724
Enrolment: Total	202	208	207	210	204	193	183	1,407
PTR	20.24	19.03	18.47	17.61	16.63	12.81	13.30	

1.5 Staying On Rate (2002/03) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	94.7	NI Av	Year 13	90.6
Year 14	87.7	NI Av	Year 14	84.4

1.6 Leavers' Destinations (2001/02)

	Year 12	NI %	Years 13/14	NI %
Total Number of Leavers	26		192	
Another School	8%	19	1%	1
Employment	12%	6	5%	5
Full-Time Further Education	81%	62	7%	7
Full-Time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	86%	85
Full-Time Training	0%	8	0%	0
Unemployed	0%	3	1%	1
Destination Unknown	0%	1	0%	1



1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Belfast Royal Academy

SCHOOL YEAR: 2003/2004

<b>GCSE &amp; GCE A LEVEL</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects</b>	100	100	100
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</b>	94	94	96
<b>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</b>	89	85	91
<b>Percentage of total exam entries obtaining Grades C or above in GCSE</b>	90	90	94
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 GCE A level subjects</b>	42	62	50
<b>Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 GCE A level subjects</b>	97	100	97
<b>Percentage of total subject entries obtaining Grade E or above at GCE A level</b>	93	98	93

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 1 showing the GCSE and GCE A level subject results over the three years ending in June 2003, in comparison with the respective NI averages*

	>10% above norm	5-10% above norm	within 5% of norm	5-10% below norm	>10% below norm
<b>GCSE A*-C</b>		Business Studies, German, Spanish	Art and Design, Biology, Chemistry, English, English Literature, French, Latin, Mathematics, Additional Mathematics, Physics, Religious Studies	Geography, Music, Double Award Science 1 <sup>st</sup> subject	Technology and Design, Drama, History, Home Economics
<b>GCE A Level A-C</b>		Music	Art & Design, Business Studies, French, Geography, German, Further Mathematics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Economics, History, Physics	Biology, Chemistry, Computer Studies/Computing, English Literature, Home Economics, Information Technology, Mathematics, Politics

*Table 2 showing the spread of the NI averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1*

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
<b>GCSE A*-C</b>	Biology, Chemistry, Drama, English, Mathematics, Music	Art and Design, Business Studies, Technology and Design, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Latin, Additional Mathematics, Physics, Religious Studies, Science Double Award 1 <sup>st</sup> Subject, Spanish			
<b>GCE A Level A-C</b>		Art and Design, Information Technology, Mathematics, Further Mathematics	Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Music, Physics, Politics, Religious Studies, Spanish	Computer Studies/Computing, Economics	

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