



*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**

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**Downshire School
Carrickfergus**

April 2011

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF DOWNSHIRE SCHOOL, CARRICKFERGUS, CO ANTRIM, BT38 7DA (321-0232)

The standard inspection of Downshire School in April 2009 highlighted the following strengths: the exemplary behaviour of most of the pupils who display a clear sense of pride in their school community; the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils and the commitment of the staff and the governors to the care and welfare of the pupils; the quality of the teaching which was good or better in the majority of the lessons observed; the good standards achieved by the pupils in most subjects at GCSE level; the commitment and dedication of the Principal to the life and work of the school and the support she provides for the staff and the pupils; and the sound links with other education providers and agencies in the local and wider community to enhance the provision for the pupils.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the need to review roles and responsibilities at all levels in order to manage change and effect whole-school improvement; and
- the need for more rigorous monitoring and evaluation to strengthen the school's strategic planning and development.

In the interval since the inspection, the following are the most important changes which have affected the work of the school:

- a review of the roles and responsibilities of all staff, with the subsequent appointment of co-ordinators for literacy, numeracy and performance analysis;
- the appointment of a new Vice-principal and the re-structuring of the senior management team (SMT);
- the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all staff in relation to pupil referral in order to improve the effectiveness of the outworking of the pastoral care policies;
- the establishment of a School Council;
- the introduction of baseline testing of the pupils in years 8 and 11; and
- the collation and analysis of performance data to monitor pupil progress.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out two monitoring visits, and a follow-up inspection which took place on the 13-14 April 2011.

The action plan produced by the school in response to the inspection findings of the original inspection is of a good quality. The school development plan (SDP) was reviewed in light of the inspection findings of April 2009 and meets the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

Good progress has been made in the areas for improvement identified in the original inspection.

The following are the most important improvements since the standard inspection:

- the programme for staff development is now linked more closely to the main priorities of the SDP, with an appropriate focus on raising standards across the whole school;
- the effective use of performance data to identify pupils who are under-achieving and the well-targeted curricular and pastoral support provided, particularly for those pupils experiencing difficulties in literacy and numeracy;

- the establishment of formal procedures for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the quality of all aspects of the school's provision and practices;
- the development of stronger links between departmental action-planning and the SDP, with the assignment of a member of SMT to oversee the work of each subject department in order to ensure that departmental priorities and actions are monitored, supported and evaluated appropriately; and
- the improved whole school strategic planning and development, led effectively by the Principal and the two Vice-principals, characterised by high levels of consultation with pupils, parents and all staff.

There remains a need to:

- develop further the capacity of the middle managers to monitor and improve learning and teaching in order to engage the pupils more actively in their learning and to ensure the work is suitably challenging for all of the pupils.

The school is embedding well a culture of self-evaluation. Useful audits have been carried out to identify the main priorities for whole-school improvement. Associated action plans are of a good standard and are leading to action to promote improvement in key aspects of the school's provision. It will be important that self-evaluation is developed further to focus more sharply on the improvements in approaches to learning and teaching.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is now good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. While the follow-up inspection has identified an area for improvement still to be addressed, the school has demonstrated the capacity to address this.

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the school's progress in addressing the remaining area for improvement.

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