



*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

**St Gemma's High School
Belfast**

March 2011

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF ST GEMMA'S HIGH SCHOOL, BELFAST, BT14 7DG (123-0173)

The standard inspection of St Gemma's High School in March 2009 highlighted the following strengths: the quality of the majority of the teaching; the effective ethos and working relationships that focus on the holistic development of all pupils, the very good standards of behaviour; the very good pastoral care and support; and the very good and consistent action taken to support pupils at risk of falling behind their peers.

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

- the need to raise the standards the pupils attain in public examinations;
- the need to review and develop the leadership and management roles at all levels to focus more specifically on developing more rigorous self-evaluation processes leading to improvement; and
- the need to review the curriculum provided to increase the range of options available to the pupils and provide flexible pathways to further study based on effective external partnerships.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out two monitoring visits; and a follow-up inspection, which took place on 14 and 15 March 2011.

The action plan produced by the school in response to the inspection findings of March 2009 was of a satisfactory quality and the school's development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

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 school development plan in the light of analysis of internal and external examination results;
- a review of all individual pupil performance data held by the school;
- an evaluation of classroom practice, pupils' classwork and the quality of the work in the 'homework' books;
- a review of the performance review and staff development process to include a sharper focus on actions to promote improvements in the pupils' learning;
- the support provided by the curriculum advisory and support services of the Belfast Education and Library Board; and
- the recent support from C2k personnel on how to use data storage systems more effectively, including how to track individual pupil progress.

The school has demonstrated some improvement through developing more rigorous self-evaluation processes, using data to inform teaching and learning and in increasing the range of options available to the pupils. However, the pace of change remains too slow to make significant improvement in the quality of education and the outcomes for pupils at key stage 4, both of which consequently remain inadequate.

The areas for improvement are therefore the need to:

- raise the standards achieved in public examinations, from the current position where:
 - 17% of the pupils obtain grades A* to C in five or more subjects at GCSE a position which is 42% below the NI average; and
 - 10% of pupils obtain grades A* to C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics a position which is 25% below the NI average; and
- continue to build upon the learning and teaching strategies which engage the pupils in their learning and improve the standards which they achieve.

In the areas inspected the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate. Important areas for improvement identified in the original inspection in standards and in learning and teaching need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the pupils.

Furthermore, in light of the decrease in enrolment from 241, at the time of the original inspection, to the current enrolment of 200 pupils, it will be important that the employing authority, governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

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