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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education  
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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Follow-up Inspection**

**Castle High School  
Belfast**

**January 2007**

## **FOLLOW-UP TO THE SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMME (SSP) INSPECTION OF CASTLE HIGH SCHOOL BELFAST, BT15 4AR (121-0258)**

The follow-up inspection in January 2006 highlighted strengths in:

- the effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's wide range of initiatives and action plans;
- the development of more realistic, individualised learning programmes for the pupils of all abilities;
- the improved attendance of the pupils;
- the consistent and effective sharing of learning objectives by the teachers with the pupils;
- the increased emphasis on providing a more vocational and occupational dimension to the curriculum at key stage (KS) 4;
- the better integration of information and communications technology (ICT) into the teachers' planning;
- the effective work to support pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties; and
- the involvement of a wide range of outside agencies in the delivery of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) in KS3.

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

- the need to build upon the current work designed to raise the pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics and, in particular, to lift their performance in reading and writing; and
- the need to continue to develop the pupils' skills in ICT by providing more meaningful experiences across all the strands of the ICT programme and by involving more subjects in contributing to the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment KS3 Information Technology (IT) Accreditation Scheme.

In the interval since the inspection, the following changes which affect the work of the school, have taken place:

- the enrolment has increased slightly from 126 to 129; a number of pupils were absorbed from another, nearby school;
- the number of teachers has remained stable at approximately 15; the school has made every effort to replace the significant number of experienced teachers who hold key management responsibilities and who have been on long-term absence for a variety of reasons; and

- the school has received reduced support from the Curriculum and Advisory Support Service of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out a follow-up inspection on 22 January 2007.

The school has made satisfactory progress and the following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the follow-up inspection:

- staff morale is high in spite of the many significant challenges the teachers are facing;
- the behaviour of the pupils in the classes observed was mostly very good although the school reports that the teachers are facing increasing challenges in this area with the influx into year 11 of a number of pupils who do not subscribe to the ethos of the school;
- the school is developing a collegiate and consistent approach to discipline; the behaviour management programme being developed currently has the potential to address the challenging issue of poor behaviour, in particular, of the pupils transferring into the school at KS 4 from other schools; the new merit system will reward attendance, introduce personal, monthly attendance targets for the pupils and have a greater focus on behaviour;
- school management is monitoring standards effectively and is setting appropriate targets for further improvement;
- the Principal, Vice-principal and SSP co-ordinator provide very good leadership and work hard in order to maintain the morale of the staff, increase pupil numbers and improve standards;
- the classroom teachers use relevant data to inform planning for learning and to determine the individual needs of the pupils in both key stages;
- the school's action plans identify appropriate areas for improvement and are reviewed regularly;
- good progress has been made, in particular, in the development of ICT throughout the school; an audit of the teachers' ICT skills and competences was carried out, followed by in-school training related to the KS 3 IT Accreditation scheme; all subject departments are now involved in this work across the four strands and the pupils are gaining better levels of attainment; it will be important for the teachers to build on the very good work achieved in ICT;
- intensive, in-class support is provided in basic literacy and numeracy in the majority of KS 3 lessons. In literacy, the teachers continue to focus, appropriately, on improving the pupils' basic skills; writing across the curriculum has been promoted effectively; approaches, including the use of aspects of Linguistic

Phonics, have been adopted to enhance the pupils' spelling and writing competences; the literacy co-ordinator has planned further in-school training for all staff and the literacy team has analysed the KS 3 assessment objectives for writing which are shared formally with all staff to promote extended writing. Explicit marking for improvement has been introduced;

- in numeracy, units of work have been developed and personal targets set for the pupils; however, due to on-going staffing difficulties, less progress has been made;
- the school continues to broaden and expand its links with the community; the recent, successful production of 'Oliver' drew in many parents and others associated with the school; the breakfast club caters for a number of pupils daily, and an evening is planned in school to deal with health care issues; and
- as part of the process, a small sample of lessons was visited by the inspectors; the lessons were well-organised and were characterised by the sharing of the intended lesson outcomes with the pupils by the teachers and the purposeful summary of the main points at the end of the class; the pupils had good opportunities to work well in groups and in pairs; ICT was used often to enhance learning and teaching and the pupils responded well to the oral questions posed by the teachers; there were good working relations between the teachers and the pupils, and, in most cases, a wide range of activities sustained the pace of the lesson and captured the attention of the pupils.

The areas which need further improvement include the need for:

- a reduction in the number of suspensions and an increase in the attendance rate of the pupils in all year groups; and
- the need to continue to focus on the key area of improving the standards achieved by the pupils at every level.

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school to ensure that the improvements which are needed are implemented.

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