



*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**



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Education and Training Inspectorate

Specialist School Follow-up Visit (2009) (Cohort 1)

**Ashfield Girls' High School
Belfast**

January 2009

FOLLOW-UP VISIT ON THE BASELINE INSPECTION FOR SPECIALIST SCHOOL STATUS (OCTOBER 2006) AND ON THE SECOND YEAR SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SEPTEMBER 2008)

As you know, Ashfield Girls' High School received recognition as a Specialist School in information and communication technology (ICT) with effect from September 2006. The pilot aims to provide an opportunity to explore the concept of specialist schools tailored to meet the particular needs of Northern Ireland's education system.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a baseline inspection as part of the above project in October 2006.

At that time, the Inspectorate reported that the school had identified appropriate and measurable targets for improvement to demonstrate that:

- information and communication technology was an area of curricular strength, which had rising levels of attainment. The school had identified more structured opportunities to develop the pupils' ICT skills at key stage 3 and increased the provision of ICT at post-16;
- there was a commitment to ongoing staff development. All departments had identified key practitioners to model best practice and coordinate and disseminate the use of ICT within the department; and
- the school was to establish new and develop existing links with key partners. The school enjoyed the support of the local community and effective and purposeful links had already been established with local primary and post-primary schools, higher education colleges, as well as business, industry and community groups.

At the same time the baseline inspection identified important areas for improvement, which were to review the targets set in order to demonstrate how:

- strategic management of the specialist school status could envision, guide and support staff. There was a need to facilitate staff in decision making, target setting, evaluating, action planning and sharing of good practice; and
- the targets had the potential to drive whole school improvement and the standards achieved by the pupils in external examinations. The targets needed to reflect more closely the current and predicted levels of performance.

In September 2008, the school submitted a second annual report to the Department of Education which indicated that some of the targets had been achieved, good progress was being made on others, and yet others had not been achieved.

The Department requested the Inspectorate to make a follow-up visit to report whether or not the school is making satisfactory progress in meeting the objectives of the project.

The Inspectorate carried out a follow-up visit on 13 January 2009 and found that while ICT remains a clear curricular strength, inadequate progress has been made in the two areas for improvement identified during the baseline inspection.

For the purpose of showing improvement more clearly, the two areas for improvement (stated above), need to be resolved with some urgency.

Furthermore, the school needs to:

- devise action plans for the targets which have been missed (and need to be revised) with a clear focus on learning and teaching and on monitoring the progress of pupils to address low and under-achievement;
- evaluate how ICT can be used to improve learning and teaching and the standards achieved by the pupils in all subjects; and
- review the roles and responsibilities of the coordinator and key heads of department within the specialist school project.

The school and the departmental development planning need to be developed further to focus more strongly on self-evaluation as a means to bring about improvement.

Copies of this report will not be sent to parents by the Department, although the school may send out copies if it so wishes. It will be published on the Inspectorate's website (www.etini.gov.uk).

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school as part of the specialist schools project.

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