



*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**

### **Specialist School Inspection (Cohort 1)**

**Ballyclare High School  
Co Antrim**

**December 2009**

## BACKGROUND

Ballyclare High School took part in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project, with a specialism in information and communication technology (ICT). The school received a budget of £464,500 over the four years of its designation.

The Minister for Education announced, on 22 April 2009, that schools in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project would have the opportunity to apply for an extension of their designation for a fifth year,

*...subject to the school demonstrating that there has been improvement since their designation began in September 2006.*

The school was asked to provide the Department of Education (DE) with an evaluation report in December 2009 summarising improvements during its specialist status in the period since September 2006 (representing some 85% of the designation period), and with reference to its prospects for the remaining period, together with a school development plan (SDP) for the proposed extension year 2010-11.

## INTRODUCTION

In December 2009, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) conducted an inspection for the purpose of quality assuring the school's self-evaluation report and its SDP for 2010-11.

In a specialist school baseline inspection report provided by the Inspectorate in October 2006, the school was advised, for the purpose of showing improvement more clearly, that it was necessary to:

*review the curriculum at key stage 3 to include more rigorous arrangements for the initial assessment of the pupils' ICT skills and to reflect on the extent of the challenge and progression provided across the range of activities provided.*

Based on three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the school to DE, the Inspectorate continued to monitor the work and progress made by the school. This monitoring indicated that the school had addressed the above issue through the base-lining of year 8 pupils and a focus on effective learning and teaching.

The annex attached provides a summary:

- of the number of pupils studying the specialism of ICT and the standards which they attained in the first three years of specialist status compared with grammar schools; and
- a summary for the same period of the whole-school results in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level examinations, compared with grammar schools of a similar type.

## **THE SPECIALISM**

The annex shows that the school exceeded its attainment targets in the specialism in each of the three years. Furthermore the school doubled the number of pupils taking GCSE ICT, compared with the period prior to designation, to 50% of year 11 and 12 pupils and significantly raised the attainment in grades A\*-A from 54% to 90% and at grade A\* from 9% to 40%.

The school successfully broadened its post-16 curriculum offer through the provision of a range of new courses: GCE Applied ICT A level; GCE ICT A level (the first results are due in 2010 with a target to achieve grades A-C set at 80%); European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) level 2; the Microsoft (MS) Academy level 3 vocational qualifications; and GCE A level Moving Image Arts.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the wide range of ICT courses provided and the significant rise in participation in ICT courses by the pupils;
- the high and rising levels of achievement in public examinations in ICT at both GCSE level and post-16;
- the very good quality and standard of the pupils' ICT work and skills;
- the commitment to improvement demonstrated by the ICT leadership within the school; and
- the very significant investment in ICT resources including the school's innovative applications of its virtual learning environment which is used to good effect by the staff and the pupils to promote independent learning.

Achievement in the specialism is very high compared with that in grammar schools. The school has demonstrated outstanding improvement in the specialism since the start of designation.

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

A major objective of the Specialist Schools' programme in the school is to raise standards across the school as a whole.

Over the period 2006-09, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in seven or more subjects at GCSE level has risen steadily and is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar selective schools. The school exceeded its targets in each of the three years.

In the same period, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in seven or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE level also rose steadily and is well above the NI average for similar selective schools.

At GCE A level, over the period 2006-09 the overall percentage of pupils attaining grades A-C in three subjects either met or exceeded the corresponding NI average, and is now currently well above that achieved by similar selective schools.

The key strengths of the whole-school improvement plan are:

- the highly consistent and rising attainment of pupils in public examinations;
- the successful fusion of the specialist school plan into the school development, staff development and associated action plans for the purpose of generating improvement;
- the quality of the teaching observed, almost all of which was very good or better, and a significant proportion of which was outstanding; and
- the commitment of the staff to developing their own skills in ICT, their work to create excellent learning resources and the effective embedding of ICT across the areas of learning, which helps the pupils to become more effective learners.

Standards are well above those being achieved in similar grammar schools. The school has demonstrated outstanding improvement over the period of designation.

## **THE COMMUNITY PLAN**

The school is able to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence which demonstrates that it has developed very effective links with the local community, including the local primary schools and community groups.

The key strengths of the community plan are:

- the effective work carried out with the primary schools leading to improvement in the children's and their teachers' ICT skills;
- the rising numbers of the primary children attaining very good levels in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment key stage 2 ICT accreditation of their work;
- the provision of effective ICT specialist courses by the school for the community and local businesses;
- the consolidation of links with local businesses through the community portal; and
- the extension of links with parents, through the parent panel and parent portal.

The school has demonstrated outstanding improvement through its community plan over the period of designation.

## **LEADERSHIP AND SELF-EVALUATION**

Throughout the period of designation the school produced three annual self-evaluation reports which were effective in supporting the development of self-evaluation processes within the school.

Over the period of designation the school's capacity for quality assuring its own work within a culture of self-evaluation has continued to develop.

The key strengths of leadership and self-evaluation in the school are:

- the committed leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the Education Technology Strategy Committee, who have a clear vision for innovation and the development of ICT in the school;
- the distributed leadership for ICT across the school and the commitment of the staff to self-evaluation and improvement;
- the creative approaches to the use of ICT in learning and teaching and the embedding of the specialism across the learning areas; and
- the effective links made with the community partners to promote the development of ICT and enhance the experiences of learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

In all three plans: for the specialism, for the whole school and for the community, the improvement made in quality and standards is outstanding.

In its school development planning for 2010-11, the school is, appropriately, clarifying its targets in the specialist subjects for a prospective extension year and planning a further extension of access in the specialism for students so that it can demonstrate additional improvement for the investment.

The Department of Education can have confidence that the school's targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action have resulted from effective monitoring, staff preparation and development, leadership and planning capability.

**SPECIALISM****GCSE ICT A\*-A**

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No of students	83	85	94	87
Actual %	77.1	83.5	90.4	
NI average for grammar schools	71	71	75	

**GCSE ICT A\*-B**

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No of students	83	85	94	87
Actual %	96.4	98.8	98.9	
NI average for grammar schools	87.7	88	89	

**GCSE ICT A\*-C**

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	83	85	94	87
Target %	90	93	95	100
Actual %	100	100	100	
Difference	+10	+7	+5	
NI average for grammar schools	95.2	95.4	96	

**A Level Applied ICT A-C**

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	36	22	37	25
Target %	80	80	80	80
Actual %	88.9	86.4	91.9	
Difference	+8.9	+6.4	+11.9	

**Numbers of students attaining a vocational post-16 qualification in ICT**

	2007	2008	2009
MS Academy (level 3)	0	12	12
ECDL (level 2)	27	12	39

## WHOLE SCHOOL

### 7+ A\*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics

	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>No. of students</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Target %</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Actual %</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>92.5</b>	<b>93.4</b>	
<b>Difference</b>		<b>+ 0.5</b>	<b>+ 1.4</b>	
<b>NI average for similar grammar schools</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	

# - targets for 2007 were set for 5+ A\*-C and were exceeded

### 3+ A levels A-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>No. of students</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Target %</b>	<b>\$</b>			
<b>Actual %</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>85.8</b>	
<b>NI average for similar grammar schools</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>73.8</b>	<b>74.7</b>	

\$ no targets in Specialist School bid

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