



*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)

Belfast Model School for Girls

December 2009

BACKGROUND

The Belfast Model School for Girls 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 £401,300 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 with an evaluation report in December 2009 summarising how it improved during its specialist status in the period since September 2006 (representing some 85% of the initial 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, to review the targets set in order to demonstrate how:

- the strengths of ICT have the potential to promote quality teaching and learning and whole school development and how they will be used to raise attainment for all pupils across the curriculum, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- management will formulate, communicate and share more fully the various roles and management structures of the key staff driving forward the initiative;
- it will apply firmer quality assurance measures, including rigorous and comprehensive success criteria, underpinned by clearer arrangements for monitoring and evaluation; and
- ICT resources will be distributed equitably across the subject departments.

On the basis of the three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the school to the Department, the Inspectorate continued to monitor the work and progress made by the school as part of the Specialist Schools' project.

This monitoring indicated that the school had addressed the above issues through the development of a culture of rigorous self-evaluation. In particular, the school recognised the need to continue to focus on improving standards in literacy and numeracy.

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; and

- a summary for the same period of whole school results in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level examinations, compared with similar non-selective schools.

THE SPECIALISM

The annex shows that the school exceeded its challenging specialist school targets in each of the four years. Furthermore the school raised significantly the number of pupils benefiting from the vocational examination courses in ICT at GCSE level from 26% to 69% of the year group and the percentage achieving the top grade at GCSE level from zero, in the year prior to designation, to 61%; at post-16 level the school introduced an A level course and raised the number of pupils taking ICT courses to 35% of the year group.

The school was successful in broadening its curriculum offer by introducing applied courses which are appropriate for the needs and interests of the pupils.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the very significant uptake by the pupils of the ICT programmes;
- the very good standard of the pupils' ICT work and skills, the improved quality, breadth and depth in the work and the high levels of achievement in ICT qualifications at both GCSE and post-16 levels;
- the good quality of the lessons observed including the good technical skills shown in the use of contemporary software by the pupils and the effective marking which provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work;
- the successful focus on the development of the leadership and management skills of key staff within the ICT department;
- the effective investment in physical resources in ICT, which are used to good effect by the staff and the pupils to improve the embedding of ICT across the wider curriculum; and
- the evolving use of the school's virtual learning environment, particularly evident in the provision leading to ICT qualifications.

There are high standards being attained in the specialism. The school has demonstrated outstanding improvement in the specialism since the start of designation.

WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In connection with its specialist status the school set out to raise standards across the school as a whole.

Over the past four years the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE has risen steadily and in 2009 was well above the NI average for non-selective schools. The school exceeded its targets in the second and third years of designation, benefiting from outstanding results in the specialism.

The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE was more variable and was below the NI average for non-selective schools in each of the three years of designation. In the second year it reached the upper quartile of results for non-selective schools with a similar intake.

At GCE A level over the period of designation the percentage of pupils attaining grades A-E in at least two subjects has risen above the targets set and was above the NI average for non-selective schools in one of the three years of designation.

The senior leadership team (SLT) has identified appropriately the need to address the degree of variation in achievement at key stage (KS) 4 and, in particular to improve the standards achieved by the pupils in a majority of subjects.

The SLT needs to ensure better sharing, and application of the use of ICT to support teaching and learning to promote consistency in the standards achieved across the subject departments.

The school has demonstrated satisfactory improvement over the period of designation. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area for improvement.

COMMUNITY PLAN

The school is able to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence which demonstrates that it has developed 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 improvements in the children's and their teachers' ICT skills;
- the high levels of attainment of the primary school children who participated in the ICT schemes supported by the school, the majority of whom achieved end of KS2 accreditation for their work;
- the improvements made in ensuring an effective transition for the children moving from KS2 into KS3;
- the effective work undertaken with a range of community groups to provide ICT courses matched to the needs of adult learners;
- the high levels of one-to-one support in the ICT courses provided by the school for the community partners that ensured that the majority of the adult learners achieved ICT accreditation; and
- the good links with parents, many of whom participated in the ICT courses to support more effectively their children's education.

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

LEADERSHIP AND SELF-EVALUATION

Throughout the period of designation the school produced self-evaluation reports which were found by the Inspectorate to be effective in supporting the development of self-evaluation processes within the school.

Over the period of designation there has been considerable improvement in the school's ability to conduct quality assurance of its own work within a culture of rigorous self-evaluation.

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

- the leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the SLT, who has a clear vision for the future development of the school;
- the hard-working SLT who have developed a range of self-evaluation strategies designed to quality assure the work of the school;
- the developing effectiveness in the analysis of data to inform target setting and future planning;
- the continuing focus on identifying individual pupil's strengths and areas for improvement, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- the important focus on the student voice to encourage pupils to develop independence and leadership skills and set targets for improvement in their own learning; and
- the effective links made with the community partners to promote the development of ICT skills through accredited courses.

To promote further improvements in the standards the pupils attain across the range of subjects the SLT needs to ensure a consistently effective whole-school focus across all subjects on the use of the specialist school status and associated resources to raise standards.

At the time of the Inspectorate's visit in December 2009, the school was preparing a detailed, well-informed SDP containing targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action for the proposed one year extension of specialist status.

CONCLUSION

In the specialist plan the improvement in quality and standards is outstanding, in the community plan it is very good and in the whole school plan it is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision.

The Inspectorate recommends that the SDP for 2010-11 address the areas for improvement relating to the degree of variation in achievement at KS4 and, in particular the need to improve the standards achieved by the pupils in a majority of subjects.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the remaining areas for improvement.

SPECIALISM**OCR National Certificate in ICT**

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	44	62	111	172
Target %	60%	70%	90%	95%
Actual %	86%	80%	99%	
Difference	+26%	+10%	+9%	
NI average for non-selective schools	not available	not available	not available	

A Level Applied ICT grades A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	introduced in 2006	7	21	S/A =10 D/A=13
Target %		100%	70%	S/A =100% D/A =90%
Actual %		100%	71.4%	
Difference		0%	+1.4%	
NI average non-selective schools		not available	not available	

S/A – single award D/A – double award

WHOLE SCHOOL

5+ A*-C GCSE

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	172	169	160	172
Target	37%	40%	45%	46%
Actual	37%	44%	66%	
Difference	=	+4%	+21%	
NI average for non-selective schools	45%	50%	49%	

5+ A*-C GCSE including English and Maths

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	172	169	151	172
Target	18%	20%	20%	20%
Actual	14%	26%	19%	
Difference	-4%	+6%	-1%	
NI average for non-selective schools	29%	30%	30%	

2+ A Level A –E

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	57	62	59	67
Target	85%	90%	90%	92%
Actual	86%	94%	92%	
Difference	+1%	+4%	+2%	
NI average for non-selective schools	94%	93%	96.6%	

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