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*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)

**Glengormley High School
Newtownabbey**

January 2010

BACKGROUND

Glengormley 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 £427,100 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 January 2010, 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 link the Specialist School plan and associated targets more overtly to the findings of the last inspection, and the overall improvement agenda in public examinations, while ensuring that effective structures to monitor and evaluate the school's work in the Specialist School plan are fully implemented;
- to review the ICT curriculum at key stage (KS) 3 to ensure that there is adequate initial assessment of the pupils' skills and appropriate challenge in the activities;
- to have a more co-ordinated approach for the development of ICT within and across the departments, to disseminate the good practice, and to contribute to whole-school improvement; and
- to review curriculum planning to provide more opportunities for the pupils to have better vocational, occupational or work-related learning experiences and opportunities, particularly at KS4.

In the context of a follow-up inspection in January 2008 the school was further recommended:

- to engage staff in all departments in a consistent, documented process of department-based self-evaluation, based on strengthening the existing benchmarked analysis of examination performance which in turn informs the setting of targets for improvement and focuses on raising standards across the whole school;

- to develop and extend the SMART¹ objectives (including adequate initial assessment of the pupils' ICT skills) for the benefit of the whole school and community aspects of the specialist school programme, for the purpose of supporting more effectively the co-ordination of the work of the programme and accountability to DE for the investment; and
- to link the Specialist School work more overtly to the overall improvement agenda by a focus on developing more challenging ICT experiences to promote and enhance active learning by the pupils and continue to develop amongst staff an understanding of ICT and connected learning.

Based on the three self-evaluation reports provided 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 begun to address some of the above issues through a focus on self-evaluation and on the development of more challenging ICT experiences linked to the overall improvement agenda. The community plan and more specifically, the creation of SMART targets, remained an area for development. Evidence from this inspection indicates that significant progress is being made on most of these issues. The annex attached provides a summary of:

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

THE SPECIALISM

The annex shows that the school has significantly broadened the curriculum choice in its specialism, to better suit the range of needs and abilities of the pupils. It has doubled the uptake of GCSE ICT which is now taken by all pupils in KS4. The proportion of pupils taking GCE A Level Applied ICT remains at 85% of year 13 even though the sixth form intake in 2009 doubled in size during the period. Furthermore, an increasing proportion of the group of 29 pupils who take the Diploma in Digital Applications and are repeating GCSE English and mathematics, remain in sixth form and progress to AS level courses or transfer to courses at the Northern Regional College. Finally, a group of 16 pupils in year 12 have successfully completed occupational studies with specialist modules in Digital Applications; a further 18 in year 11 are taking a module in digital animation. This course also attracts a small number of pupils from special schools.

The standards pupils achieve in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ICT Accreditation at KS3 are outstanding, with almost all pupils gaining level 7 or better and over half the pupils achieving level 8. Attainment in GCSE ICT at A*-A in each year and A*-C in two of the three years has risen and remains well above the average for non-selective schools. Attainment in GCE Applied level ICT met the target set in two of the three years and significantly exceeded the average for non-selective schools in both grade bands A-B and A-C. The standards pupils achieve in Digital Applications are very good, with 86% achieving a credit or higher in 2009.

¹ SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the high quality of the teaching in the ICT lessons observed and the demonstration by pupils of all abilities of high levels of competence and application of ICT skills;
- the excellent results achieved by the pupils in CCEA ICT Accreditation at KS3;
- the high levels of achievement in public examinations in the specialism in KS4 and at post-16 level;
- the rapid development of content in a new Virtual Learning Environment, since it was introduced in September 2009, and the plans for a parental portal to strengthen support for teaching and learning; and
- the investment in ICT, the work of the Learning Managers and the progress made in developing the role of ICT in teaching and learning across the school.

Achievement in the specialism is high compared with that in similar schools. The school has exceeded most of its targets in ICT over the first three years of designation and has demonstrated outstanding improvement in the specialism since the start of designation.

WHOLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

A major objective of the specialist school programme is to raise standards across the school as a whole.

The annex shows that, at GCE A level over the period of designation the overall percentage of pupils attaining grades A-E in at least two subjects exceeded in the first two years the internal targets originally set in the specialist plan, as well as the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools. In the third year, attainment fell below average for similar non-selective schools.

After the first year of designation, and as a result of an improved focus on self-evaluation, more effective data-analysis and target setting, the school reviewed and reduced the targets originally set for five plus A*-C at GCSE level for the subsequent years of the programme to reflect more accurately the knowledge being obtained about expected performance of each year group.

By the third year, the school demonstrated a significant improvement in the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE level although remaining below the NI average for non-selective schools. In the same period, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE level has improved, while also remaining below the corresponding NI average.

While some improvement has been effected over the period of designation, there is variation, which needs to be addressed, in the standards achieved by the pupils in a majority of subjects at KS4. The Principal and the heads of department have identified appropriately the steps necessary to improve achievement overall.

The key strengths of the whole school improvement plan are:

- the quality of teaching in the lessons observed, the majority of which was very good;
- the curriculum choice which enables pupils to repeat public examinations in English and mathematics, together with an enriched vocational programme in Digital Applications which is leading to a significant improvement of recruitment of the pupils to the sixth form;
- the focus on guidance and mentoring pupils undertaking GCSE and post-16 courses to raise expectations and levels of student commitment;
- the focus on more effective use of data analysis by all teachers to monitor the progress of learners and to set targets which are both realistic and stretching; and
- the integration of the specialist school plan into the SDP and associated action planning to generate improvement.

While standards are low compared with those achieved by similar non-selective schools, the school has demonstrated satisfactory improvement over the period of designation.

The school needs to continue to build on the progress across the school achieved in the most recent year of designation.

THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The school reports that its investment and the wide range of activities undertaken as part of its community plan have enriched links with the local primary schools and community groups as well as benefiting the staff in primary and post-primary school and business partners. While the reports provide some qualitative feedback on the benefits arising, they are insufficiently evaluative. The school needs to agree measures of improvement with the partners.

The key strengths of the community plan include:

- the work carried out with primary schools leading to a broadening of the children's experiences and improvement in their skills;
- staff training opportunities in ICT for teachers in the partner primary and post-primary schools;
- increased awareness about careers in ICT for girls in a range of schools as a result of the FemininITy conference; and
- the developing links with a number of community partners.

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

LEADERSHIP AND SELF-EVALUATION

Throughout the period of designation the school produced three self-evaluation reports which helped to support 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 improved, particularly over the current school year.

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

- the commitment and focus provided by the recently appointed Principal on raising expectations and standards and increasing accountability for improvement;
- the work of key staff to develop the specialism;
- the good focus by all the teachers on the analysis of performance data and improving teaching and learning in order to raise standards; and
- the commitment to improvement as evidenced through the learning support for the pupils both individually and in groups, the positive atmosphere in the school and the motivation of both pupils and staff.

CONCLUSION

In the specialist plan the improvement made in quality and standards is outstanding while in the whole school and the community plans it is satisfactory.

The school has produced a plan for a fifth year of specialism related to the SDP for 2009-12. For the purpose of showing improvement more clearly in the community plan, the school needs to review the agreed targets to include measurable improvements for the benefit of all partners.

The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the community plan and the progress in attainment across the whole school which has been achieved over the most recent year of designation.

Specialism**GCSE ICT A*-A**

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	100	141	135	194
Target %	28	30	28	45
Actual %	32.2	37	47	
Difference %	+4.2	+7	+19	
NI average non-selective schools	27	23	30	

GCSE ICT A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	100	141	135	194
Target %	85	87	88	85
Actual %	89.5	84.4	89	
Difference	+4.5	-2.6	+1	
NI average non-selective schools	79	77	80	

A Level Applied ICT A-B

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	38	37	41	41
Target %	not set	not set	not set	80
Actual %	76.3	78.4	80	

A Level Applied ICT A-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	38	37	41	41
Target %	100	100	100	100
Actual %	100	100	95	
Difference %	0	0	-5	

Diploma in Digital Applications

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Numbers	13	11	28	29
% Distinction			7.1	
% Merit	7.6	9.1	42.9	
% Credit	53.9	36.4	35.7	
% Pass	30.8	54.5	7.1	
%CIDA	7.6		7.1	

Whole School

5+ GCSEs A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	192	195	179	197
Target	38	40	36	45
Actual	36	32	43	
Difference	-2	-8	+6	
NI average for non-selective schools	45	50	49	

5+ GCSEs A*-C including mathematics and English

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	192	195	179	197
Target	not set	not set	not set	25
Actual	21	21	23	
NI average for non-selective	29	30	30	

2+ GCE A Levels A-E

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of pupils	59	52	55	51
Target	92	95	96	96
Actual	95	96	91	
Difference	+ 3	+1	-5	
NI average for non-selective	94	93	94	

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