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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)

**Shimna Integrated College
Newcastle**

January 2010

BACKGROUND

Shimna Integrated College took part in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project. Its specialism is Modern Languages. The school received a budget of £254,000 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".

In December 2009 the school was asked to provide the Department of Education (DE) with a School Development Plan for the proposed extension year 2010-11 and with an evaluation report summarising how it improved during its specialist status in the period since September 2006 including reference to its prospects for the remaining period.

INTRODUCTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) conducted an inspection in January 2010 for the purpose of quality assuring the school's self-evaluation report and its school development plan for 2010-2011.

In a 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:

- *it will focus on rigorous whole-school development using the strengths in modern languages to promote quality learning and teaching including the integration of more autonomous and independent learning strategies;*
- *it will support the further development of ICT as an integral part of the teaching and learning process.*

On the basis of its audit of the annual self-evaluation reports provided by the school, the Inspectorate conducted a formal inspection visit in October 2007 and recommended that the school address a number of issues which had been inadequately resolved. These included:

- *the need to develop self-evaluation within and across departments so that strengths and areas for development are clearly identified, and to focus targets more clearly on learning and teaching across the school including independent learning and differentiated teaching approaches; and*
- *(the need for) a stronger focus on the whole-school dimension of the programme and to refine further ways of monitoring and evaluating, at all levels, the impact of (the) specialism on whole-school targets.*

The annex attached provides:

- a summary of the number of pupils studying the specialism of modern languages comprising French, German, Irish and Spanish and the standards which they attained in the first three years of specialist status compared with other non-selective schools;

- 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 all pupils study at least one modern language at GCSE level and that the percentage of pupils choosing to study two languages at GCSE has tripled since the start of designation to one quarter of all pupils, exceeding the internal target. The number of pupils taking an A level in a language remains small and, as a consequence, results vary considerably over the corresponding period.

While there is some variation in achievement at GCSE, the trend across the four languages and over the period of the designation is one of overall improvement. Standards achieved met or exceeded both the targets set internally in almost all cases and were at or above the average for non-selective schools in three of the languages. In Irish they were below both the targets set and the levels attained in non-selective schools in the first two years and exceeded both the target and the average for similar schools in the third year.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the significant increase in pupils choosing to study two languages at GCSE;
- the very good use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning, with the effective use of the interactive whiteboard to stimulate oral work;
- the good opportunities that the pupils have in some classes to ask and answer questions in the target language and the use of other strategies to promote successful language learning;
- the co-ordinated approach to monitoring pupil performance across the four language skills and supporting the pupils, independently of their abilities to achieve well in public examinations;
- a co-ordinator for modern languages, assisted by the subject department heads, who shares expertise in the use of ICT; and,
- the approaches to benchmarking with other departments, in particular in leading whole-school development.

The inspection identified the need for a more consistent use of the target language across all members of the department.

The standards achieved by pupils studying modern languages are good, when compared to other non-selective schools. The school has demonstrated good improvement over the period of designation.

WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

The annex shows that the school met most of its targets in each of the three years. At GCE A level since the start of designation, the overall percentage of pupils attaining grades A-E in at least two subjects has been broadly similar to the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) average in two of the three years.

Over the past three years the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE level has risen steadily, until 2009 to just below the internal target. This percentage and those for previous years are consistently well above the NI average for non-selective schools.

Over the same period the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE rose to 50% in the second year, remaining well above the average for non-selective schools.

The strengths of the whole-school plan include:

- the improving standards in Literacy, with an improving trend in GCSE and key stage (KS) 3 English results;
- the specialism of modern languages and the international dimension which has helped to create an ethos of improvement within the school.

The school has demonstrated good improvement across the majority of subject areas over the period of designation.

COMMUNITY PLAN

The school reports, and has quantitative measures to demonstrate, that it has developed very good links with the local community, including the local primary schools, post-primary schools and community groups.

The key strengths of the community plan are:

- the very good language work carried out with the primary schools, with 425 primary children benefiting from the outreach programme;
- the improvements made in ensuring an effective transition for the children moving from KS2 into KS3; and the enthusiasm shown for languages by their choice of Shimna;
- the effective provision of a range of accredited and non-accredited language courses resulting in some 50 adult learners gaining qualifications in modern languages;

- the good language support provided by the school for the community partners, Blackwater Integrated College and St Mary's High School, Downpatrick; and
- the extensive links with local businesses which participate in the European Day of Languages organised each year by the school.

The inspection identifies the need for the school to continue to collect data and evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the community plan and associated initiatives.

The school has demonstrated good 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 found by the Inspectorate to be effective in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement within the specialisms, the whole-school and community plans. Progress has been made since the 2007 inspection visit to address the areas for development specified in these reports and based appropriately on assessment data to set and adjust targets for particular cohorts of pupils. Involvement in the specialist schools' project has increased use of benchmarking data across all departments and the more extensive monitoring of student progress, with a sharper focus on addressing under-achievement.

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

- the effective leadership of the planning team and specialist schools co-ordinators who have developed a range of self-evaluation strategies designed to improve the work of the school;
- the development of the analysis of data, led by teachers in the specialist department, to inform target setting and future planning;
- the dissemination of good practice across departments;
- the continuing focus on the identification of the strengths and areas for improvement of individual pupils, particularly in the science department, where strategies for pupil tracking in years 13 and 14 have been piloted and disseminated to the rest of the school;
- the effective links made with the community partners to promote language learning.

At the time of the Inspectorate's visit in January 2010, the school had prepared, through appropriate consultation, a detailed School Development Plan (SDP) containing targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action for the proposed one year extension of Specialist status.

The Inspectorate recommends that the SDP should be reviewed to address the issues of a more consistent use of the target language, the need for measurable improvements in the community plan and the need to address the degree of variation in achievement at KS4.

CONCLUSION

In all three plans: the specialist plan, the whole-school plan and the community plan, the improvement in uptake and standards is good.

The planning team has identified appropriately the need to address the degree of variation in achievement at KS4.

The inspectorate will continue to monitor progress with the three issues identified here. The Department of Education can be confident that the school has displayed the capacity to sustain improvement.

French

GCSE French A* - C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	23	33	42	18
Target %	65	56	50	44
Actual %	65	55	60	
Difference	0	-1	10	
NI Average for similar schools	46.7	50.4	50.4	

A Level French A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	1	3	2	6
Target %	100	33	100	66
Actual %	100	0	100	
Difference	0	-33	0	
NI Average for similar schools	89	88	88	

German

GCSE German A* - C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	12	7	11	4
Target %	67	69	91	75
Actual %	67	86	91	
Difference	0	17	0	
NI Average for similar schools	59	75	75	

A Level German A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	1	3	2	1
Target %	0	100	100	100
Actual %	0	100	100	
Difference	0	0	0	
NI Average for similar schools	89	90	90	

Spanish

GCSE Spanish A* - C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	34	29	20	47
Target %	52	54	60	58
Actual %	44	59	75	
Difference	-8	5	19	
NI Average for similar schools	43	56	56	

A Level Spanish A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	0	2	7	7
Target %	0	100	57	86
Actual %	0	100	57	
Difference	0	0	0	
NI Average for similar schools	86	88	88	

Irish

GCSE Irish A* - C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	12	9	13	20
Target %	42	56	85	75
Actual %	50	44	92	
Difference	+8	-12	+7	
NI Average for similar schools	66	74	75	

A Level Irish A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	2	0	2	3
Target %	100	0	100	67
Actual %	100	0	50	
Difference	0	0	-50	
NI Average for similar schools	95	96	96	

WHOLE SCHOOL**5 + A*-C GCSE including En and Ma**

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	71	74	79	79
Target		45	43	
Actual	41	50	46	
Difference		+5	+3	
NI Average for similar schools	29	30	30	

2+ A Level A –E

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	41	46	42	54
Target		85	90	95
Actual	93	83	95	
Difference		-2	+5	
NI Average for similar schools	94	93		

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