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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)

**St Cecilia's College
Derry**

January 2010

BACKGROUND

St Cecilia's College took part in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project, with a specialism in Performing and Visual Arts. The school received a budget of £372,200 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' 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 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 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, to review the targets set in order to demonstrate:

- that all staff within the school have a clear understanding of the philosophy underpinning the Specialist School initiative; and
- how the strengths in the area of Performing Arts link clearly with the school development planning process.

On the basis of the three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the school to the Department, the Inspectorate continued to monitor the progress made.

This monitoring indicated that the school had addressed the above issues through a developing culture of 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 for the six qualifications which make up the Performing and Visual Arts specialism (art and design, dance, drama, music, and physical education) 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 non-selective schools.

THE SPECIALISM

The annex shows that the school has been successful in broadening its curriculum offer by introducing applied courses in art and design and in dance which are appropriate for the needs and abilities of the pupils. The school has also included in its courses pupils from as many as five other post-primary schools in the area. The school has achieved challenging specialist school targets for GCSE and is above the average for non-selective schools in three of the six qualifications. The annex shows that the school exceeded almost all of its challenging attainment targets in the Performing Arts in each of the three. The college is above the Northern Ireland (NI) average, where available, for similar non-selective schools in all three specialist subjects.

In the first year of specialist status uptake of the specialist subjects by pupils from St Cecilia's College doubled compared with the year prior to designation, and fell back subsequently.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the initial uptake by the pupils of the five subjects offered and the continuing improvement in uptake of art and design and music;
- the successful inclusion and integration of pupils from other schools within the areas of specialism;
- the good quality of the lessons observed;
- the enrichment opportunities, during and after school provided by the focus on the specialist areas; and
- the clear vision held by the Principal and Vice-principal of the role and contribution of the specialist areas with regard to whole school improvement.

There are good standards being attained in three of the five specialist areas and evidence of improvement, although variable, in the remaining two. The school has demonstrated good improvement overall in the specialist areas since the start of designation. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement in the remaining two subjects.

WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

At GCE A level over the period of designation, the overall percentage of pupils attaining grades A-E in at least two subjects has risen steadily and is above the corresponding NI average.

Over the past three years the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE has risen and is very significantly above the NI average for non-selective schools. The school exceeded its targets in each of the three years.

Over the same period the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE was above the NI average for non-selective schools in all three years.

The school has exceeded most of its targets and is achieving above the NI average for non-selective schools in a significant number of subjects.

The school has demonstrated very good improvement over the period of designation.

COMMUNITY PLAN

The school is able to demonstrate that it has developed effective links with the local community, including the local primary and post-primary schools and community groups.

The key strengths of the community plan are:

- the successful links and excellent working relationships with a wide range of external stakeholders who support the specialist subjects;
- the effective work carried out with the primary schools, particularly the half-day workshop provided to all feeder primary schools;
- the collaborative programme developed with post-primary schools in the Foyle Learning Community;
- the links developed with the Londonderry Connections Group; and
- the shared staff development with teachers from post-primary partner schools in the Area Learning Community.

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 self-evaluation reports which were found by the Inspectorate to be effective in supporting the development of the whole-school self-evaluation processes.

Over the period of designation there has been improvement in the school's ability to implement quality assurance processes within a developing culture of self-evaluation.

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

- the strong strategic leadership of the Principal and Vice-principal;
- the good management of the additional investment, including the effective support of the pupils provided in the areas of literacy and numeracy which has improved standards in these areas;
- the strong contribution the school makes to the local community;
- the strong commitment, through the specialism, to meeting the needs of all of the pupils across the full range of ability and to raising standards in external examinations; and

- the improvement in the standards which the pupils attain across the range of subjects.

The senior management is aware that they need to ensure a consistent whole-school focus across all subjects in relation to base-lining, benchmarking, target-setting and the dissemination of the existing good practice in some subjects.

At the time of the Inspectorate's visit in January 2010, the school was preparing a detailed, well-informed SDP including more appropriate, revised targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action for the proposed one year extension of specialist status. The Inspectorate recommends that the issues reported here are addressed explicitly in the SDP.

CONCLUSION

In the specialist and the community plan the improvement in quality and standards is good. Furthermore, in the whole school plan the improvement in quality and standards is very good. The strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision.

The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the remaining areas for improvement in attainment across two of the specialist subjects and in a whole-school approach to improvement planning and sharing good practice.

SPECIALIST AREA

Performing Arts - Art & Design

GCSE A*-A

	2007 (C2)	2008 (C3)	2009	2010
No. of students	14	17	20	23
Actual	64.3	41.2	45	
NI average for non-selective schools	23	24	23	

GCSE A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	14	17	20	23
Target %	90	90	100	95
Actual %	100	100	100	
Difference	+10	+10	=	
NI average for non-selective schools	75	77	76	

Performing Arts - Applied Art & Design

GCSE A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	13	18	21	0
Target %	70	75	60	
Actual %	46.2	83.3	57.5	
Difference	-23.8	8.3	-2.5	

Performing Arts - Music

GCSE A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	25	16	16	15
Target %	90	90	100	100
Actual %	100	87.5	100	
Difference	+10	-2.5	=	
NI average for non-selective schools	83	85	86	

Performing Arts - Drama

GCSE A*-A

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	18	13	15	18
Actual %	44.4	84.6	40	
NI average for non-selective schools	19	20	19	

GCSE A*-C

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of students	18	13	15	18
Target %	90	90	100	100
Actual %	100	100	93.3	
Difference	+10	+10	-6.7	
NI average for non-selective schools	77	79	79	

Performing Arts - Dance

GCSE A*-C

	2007	2008	2009 (*)	2010 (*)
No. of students	0	13	12	17
Target %	n/a	85	n/a	100
Actual %	0	61.5	100	
Difference		-23.5		
NI average for non-selective schools	62	57		

(*) Changed to BTEC First Certificate in Performing Arts Dance Double-award from 2009

Performing Arts – PE Studies

GCSE A*-C

	2007 (C2)	2008 (C3)	2009	2010
No. of students	13	9	14	15
Target %	85	87	80	67
Actual %	69.2	55.6	64.3	
Difference	-15.8	-31.4	-15.7	
NI average for non-selective schools	65	63	62	

Specialist GCE A Level A-E

Subject	2007	2008	2009	2010
Art				
No of pupils	10	9	10	12
Target A-E	100	100	100	100
Actual % A-C	100	100	100	
Actual % A-E	100	100	100	
NI A-C average for non-selective schools	85	87	87	
Moving Image Arts				
No of pupils	N/A	10	8+1	7
Target A-E		100	100	100
Actual % A-C	Not available	100	100	
Actual % A-E		100	100	
Drama				
No of pupils	4	6	11+3	7 + 5
Target A-E	100	100	90	100
Actual % A-C	100	67	91	
Actual % A-E	100	100	100	
NI A-C average for non-selective schools	82	82	87	
Music				
No of pupils	2	0	12	8 +2
Target A-E	100	0	100	100
Actual % A-C	0	0	75	
Actual % A-E	100		100	
NI A-C average for non-selective schools	63		66	
PE Studies				
No of pupils	4	8	4	5
Target A-E	100	100	100	100
Actual % A-C	75	38	75	
Actual % A-E	100	88	100	
NI A-C average for non-selective schools	63	64	58	
Dance				
No of pupils	6	3	0	5 + 4
Target A-E	85	100	0	100
Actual % A-C	17	68	0	
Actual % A-E	100	68		
NI A-C average for non-selective schools	55	70		

Numbers of pupils stated as “+” are from other schools in the Area Learning Community

WHOLE-SCHOOL

5+ GCSEs A*-C

	2007 (C2)	2008 (C3)	2009	2010
No. of students	150	145	143	140
Target %	60	63	72	75
Actual %	77	72	78	
Difference	+ 17	+ 9	+ 6	
NI average for non-selective schools	45	50	49	

5+ GCSEs A*-C including Maths and English

	2007 (C2)	2008 (C3)	2009	2010
No. of students	150	145	143	140
Target %	40	33	48	52
Actual %	43	34	50	
Difference	+ 3	+ 1	+ 2	
NI average for non-selective schools	29	30	30	

2+ A Levels A-E

	2007 (C2)	2008 (C3)	2009	2010
No. of students	77	82	85	88
Target %	96	97	97	100
Actual %	91	96	99	
Difference	-5	-1	+2	
NI average for non-selective schools	94	93	93	

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