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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 John's College
Dromore**

January 2010

BACKGROUND

St John's College, Dromore, took part in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project, with a specialism in Business and Enterprise. The school received a budget of £150,800 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 how it improved 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, to review the targets set in order to demonstrate:

- *more effective use of the Vocational Enhancement Programme, to ensure that pupils at key stage 4 have access to a more appropriate range of post-16 vocational programmes that meet their career aspirations and enhance their progression opportunities; and*
- *more effective procedures to plan and review the School to Work programme, including the need to provide appropriate information and guidance to employers on induction arrangements in the workplace and on child protection issues.*

In addition, the school was advised of the need to:

- *show rising levels of attainment in technology and design; and*
- *provide pupils with access to a formal careers education, advice, information and guidance programme.*

Based on the three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the college to DE, the Inspectorate conducted a formal follow-up visit in January 2009 at which time the college was revising its internal targets to make them more meaningful and challenging in the context of the small numbers enrolled in the relevant pupil groups. The Inspectorate further advised the college of the need to:

- *negotiate a formal Service Level Agreement with employers offering work placements to the school's pupils; and*
- *require all employers to sign the Service Level Agreement.*

The annex attached provides a summary of:

- the number of pupils studying the five contributory subjects within the specialism: business studies, home economics, information technology, mathematics and technology 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 while the college has met most of its agreed targets, with the exception of 2007, the college failed to meet all its targets over the three years.

Three of the five subjects are consistent areas of curricular strength. Taking into account the small enrolment in the school and small numbers in some subject groups statistical analysis has to be handled with care. Performance in home economics at GCSE grades A*-C rose from 40% prior to designation to 100% in the first year and has remained constant since. Achievement at GCSE A*-C in information technology has also been consistently very good. Both subjects exceeded the targets set and are well above performance in non-selective schools. Achievement in business studies, while falling well below the school's own target in 2009 it has remained above the Northern Ireland (NI) average.

In mathematics, achievement has been inconsistent; while above the average for non-selective schools for the first two years, performance in 2009 is well below the level of attainment in 2006 and missed the adjusted target set by the college by 8%. Technology exceeded the target set and was above the average for similar schools in the first year of designation but has remained well below both since.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the very good levels of achievement in business studies, home economics and information technology;
- the good opportunities pupils have to develop their knowledge and understanding of business and enterprise across the curriculum; and
- the good use the college makes of guest speakers from local industry.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to raise levels of achievement in mathematics and technology; and
- to use the available data effectively to inform target setting for all the subjects within the specialism.

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

WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

The annex shows that the college met or exceeded most of its targets in each of the three years.

The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE level has doubled since the year prior to designation. Performance has consistently been above both the targets agreed and the NI average for non-selective schools.

The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE was well above the NI average for non-selective schools in the first year. Since then it has remained around the NI average for non-selective schools. In both cases, with and without English and mathematics, it is above the upper quartile when compared against schools with a similar intake.

The college has demonstrated good improvement over the period of designation.

COMMUNITY PLAN

The college reports that it has developed good links with the local community, including cross-community links with the local primary schools, the South West Regional College and a range of community groups.

The key strengths of the community plan include:

- the close involvement of the community and local businesses in the work of the college since specialist designation;
- the good work carried out with the primary schools leading to improvements in the children's and their teachers' skills;
- the work undertaken to provide facilities and resources for use by local community groups; and
- the provision of a range of night classes for the local community.

This provision is valued highly by the local community as evidenced by the testimonials supplied by the schools and local business and community representatives.

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

LEADERSHIP AND SELF-EVALUATION

Throughout the period of designation the college produced three annual self-evaluation reports which while very detailed lacked evaluative analysis.

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

- the commitment of the Principal and curriculum leaders to develop the aims of the specialist schools programme;

- the commitment of the college to the welfare of the pupils and to community development;
- the efforts made by the college's leadership team and the teachers to provide as wide a curriculum as possible, especially given the very small numbers of pupils; and
- the effective use of its specialist college designation to raise the morale of staff and pupils, and to raise the profile of the college.

Areas for improvement

- Given the size of the school there is limited demand for a number of GCSE subjects and others have very small teaching groups. This situation needs to be addressed effectively by the college through the development of the local area learning community.
- College leaders need to engage in more effective analysis of data to inform target setting and future planning to promote continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION

In two of the three plans: for the whole college and the community, the improvement made in quality and standards is good. In the specialist plan it is satisfactory.

At the time of the Inspectorate's visit in January 2010, the college was preparing a detailed, well-informed, SDP containing targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action for the proposed one year extension of specialist status.

The SDP plan should address the issues identified in this report by specifying challenging targets; have an explicit focus on learning and teaching and on raising levels of attainment across the college.

The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

SPECIALISM**GCSE Business Studies A* - C**

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of entries | 9 | 10 | 13 | 7 |
| Target % | 65 | 66 | 67 | 71 |
| Actual % | 67 | 70 | 54 | |
| Difference | +2 | +4 | -13 | |
| NI Average for similar schools | 49 | 51 | 51 | |

GCSE Home Economics A* - C

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of entries | 13 | 13 | 10 | 12 |
| Target % | 68 | 69 | 85 | 85 |
| Actual % | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Difference | +32 | +31 | +15 | |
| NI Average for similar schools | 61.9 | 62 | 64 | |

GCSE Information Technology A* - C

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of entries | 17 | 10 | 13 | 17/8 |
| Target % | 74.2 | 75.2 | 76.2 | 90 |
| Actual % | 100 | 90 | 92.3 | |
| Difference | +25.8 | +14.8 | +16.1 | |
| NI Average for similar schools | 78.7 | 77 | 80 | |

GCSE Mathematics A* - C

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of entries | 24 | 34 | 31 | 29 |
| Target % | 38 | 39 | 40 | 50 |
| Actual % | 61.76 | 50 | 42 | |
| Difference | +23.76 | +11 | +2 | |
| NI Average for similar schools | 41.8 | 44 | 43 | |

GCSE Technology A* - C

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of entries | 9 | 11 | 12 | 10 |
| Target % | 50 | 51 | 54 | 54 |
| Actual % | 67 | 45.45 | 41.8 | |
| Difference | +17 | -5.55 | -12.2 | |
| NI Average for similar schools | 61.1 | 59 | 64 | |

WHOLE SCHOOL

5+ A*-C GCSE

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of students | 35 | 34 | 35 | 34 |
| Target | 39 | 40 | 59 | 66 |
| Actual | 80 | 58.8 | 66 | |
| Difference | +41 | +18.8 | +7 | |
| NI Average for non-selective schools | 45 | 50 | 49 | |

5+ A*-C GCSE including En and Ma

| | 2007 Year 1 | 2008 Year 2 | 2009 Year 3 | 2010 Year 4 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| No. of students | 35 | 34 | 35 | 34 |
| Target | n/a | n/a | 35 | 35 |
| Actual | 54 | 32.3 | 29 | |
| Difference | n/a | n/a | -6 | |
| NI Average for non-selective schools | 29 | 30 | 30 | |

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