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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 Louise's Comprehensive College
Belfast**

January 2010

BACKGROUND

St Louise's Comprehensive College took part in the first cohort of the Specialist Schools' pilot project, with a specialism in Performing Arts. The school received a budget of £595,600 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 college 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 college was advised, for the purpose of showing improvement more clearly, that it was necessary to:

"...review aspects of the targets set in order to demonstrate a greater emphasis on comparisons of examination data with the Northern Ireland (NI) averages in the subjects related to the Performing Arts, the wider curriculum and at whole-school level".

Based on the three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the college to the DE, the Inspectorate continued to monitor the work and progress made by the college.

This monitoring indicated that the college had addressed the above issue through the development of a culture of rigorous self-evaluation incorporating the use of wide-ranging data, focusing on effective learning and teaching and improving standards in literacy and numeracy.

The annex attached provides a summary of:

- the number of pupils studying for the three subject qualifications which make up the Performing Arts: Drama, Media and Dance 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 college exceeded almost all of its challenging attainment targets in the Performing Arts in each of the three years and significantly raised attainment during the corresponding period. The college is above the NI average, where available, for non-selective schools in all three specialist subjects.

Furthermore, compared with the period prior to designation the college successfully broadened its curriculum offer through the provision of new applied courses which are appropriate to the needs and abilities of the pupils. The college has both increased uptake within the Performing Arts and has extended its courses to pupils from as many as six other post-primary schools in the area.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the high levels of achievement in public examinations in the Performing Arts at GCSE level and in post-16;
- the significant uptake by the pupils in the general and applied Performing Arts courses and the successful integration of pupils from other schools within the specialist areas;
- the very good quality of the lessons observed, which remained consistently high throughout the designated period;
- the programmes available within the specialist areas for enrichment and accelerated learning opportunities supported by flexible time-tabling arrangements with other schools, and links with external partnership agencies;
- the strong commitment to improvement demonstrated by the Performing Arts leadership within the college; and
- the degree of consultation opportunities available for the pupils to inform learning and teaching within the Performing Arts.

Achievement in the specialism is very high compared with that in similar schools. The college has exceeded its targets 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 college 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 in 2008 corresponded with the NI average for non-selective schools.

Over the past four years, the percentages of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects at GCSE has risen substantially and remains well above the NI average for similar non-selective schools. The college has exceeded its targets in each of the three years.

In the same period, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics at GCSE also improved and in each consecutive year of the designated period it remains well above the corresponding NI average.

Similar levels of attainment at whole-college level are also reflected for those pupils obtaining 5 or 7 subjects at GCSE at grades A*-E (including English and mathematics).

In almost one-half of subjects at GCSE the college is achieving above the respective NI average for similar non-selective schools.

The key strengths of the whole-school improvement plan are:

- the high standards that the pupils achieve, including the very good level of attainment in public examinations at the end of Key Stage (KS) 4;
- the very good quality of the lessons observed in the non-specialism subjects which remained consistent during the designated period;
- the significance given by the staff to innovative, personalised and creative learning and teaching approaches which are informed through the well-embedded culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement within the college;
- the high quality of care, guidance and support provided for the pupils to overcome existing barriers to learning;
- the wide-ranging curricular pathways which lead to employment and further and higher education opportunities; and
- the successful integration of the specialist school plan into the college development, staff development programme and action planning to generate improvement.

Standards are well above those being achieved in similar non-selective schools. The college has demonstrated very good improvement over the period of designation.

THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The college is able to provide substantial quantitative and qualitative evidence which demonstrates that it has developed very effective 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 effective work carried out with eleven primary schools leading to improvement, particularly through major showcase events and the allocation of specialist staffing from the college to support learning and teaching at KS2;
- the collaborative programme developed to improve access to the Entitlement Framework for pupils in partner post-primary schools;
- the successful link established with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the quality of provision for adults with learning disabilities incorporating opportunity to achieve entry level accreditation in performance skills;
- the quality of the induction programme to ensure an effective transition for children from KS2 into KS3; and

- the consolidation and extension of links with parents, local businesses, community groups and external agencies.

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

LEADERSHIP AND SELF-EVALUATION

Throughout the period of designation the college produced three self-evaluation reports which were effective in supporting the development of self-evaluation processes within the college.

Over the period of designation the college's capacity for quality assuring its own work within a culture of rigorous self-evaluation has continued to develop.

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

- the outstanding strategic leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the Vice-principal: Learning and Teaching and the recently restructured senior leadership, improvement and business teams, who have a clear vision for innovation and whole-school improvement;
- the highly rigorous culture of self-evaluation that underpins the development work at all levels to quality assure the work of the college;
- the effective provision for pastoral care featuring frequent opportunities for the pupil voice to encourage young people to develop personal and social skills and set targets for improvement in their own learning;
- the ongoing professional development programme for staff to support quality learning and teaching including: the effective use of data, pupil tracking, intervention strategies and 'thinking classrooms'; and
- the good management of the additional investment, including the effective support provided in the areas of literacy and numeracy which has improved standards in these areas.

CONCLUSION

In two of the three plans: for the specialism and the community, the improvement made in quality and standards is outstanding. In the whole-college plan it is very good.

In its college development planning for 2010-11, the college is, appropriately, clarifying its targets in the specialist subjects for a prospective extension year and planning a further extension of access in the specialism for pupils so that it can demonstrate additional improvement for the investment.

The Department of Education can have confidence that the college's targets, implementation strategies and priorities for action have resulted from effective monitoring, staff preparation and development, leadership and planning capability.

SPECIALISM

GCSE Drama A*-A

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	111	103	43*	51
Target %	29.3	30.3	31.3	32.3
Actual %	36	49	58	
Difference	+6.7	+18.7	+26.7	
NI Average for non-selective schools	19	20	18.7	

GCSE Drama A*-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	111	103	43*	51
Target %	93.2	94.2	94.2	94.2
Actual %	98	98.1	100	
Difference	+4.8	+3.9	+5.8	
NI Average for non-selective schools	77	79	79	

* Uptake of GCSE Drama reduced in 2009 as a result of the introduction of new courses. The total uptake for Drama in 2009 in both general and applied KS4 courses is **107** pupils. Uptake for new courses is recorded in the BTEC tables which follow.

BTEC Performing Arts First Certificate A*-C Drama

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	N/A	N/A	18*	10
Target %			94.2	94.2
Actual %			100	
Difference			+5.8	
NI Average for non-selective schools			N/A	

NQF Performing Skills A*-C Drama

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	N/A	N/A	46*	41
Target %			94.2	94.2
Actual %			100	
Difference			+5.8	
NI Average for non-selective schools			N/A	

Post 16 Level 3 BTEC National Award/Certificate Dance A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	4	6	8	11
Target %	100	100	100	100
Actual %	100	100	100	
Difference	---	---	---	
NI Average for similar schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	

GCSE Media Studies A*-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	22	33	27	37
Target %	86	86	86	86
Actual %	86	84.4	92.4	
Difference	-----	-1.6	+6.4	
NI Average for similar schools	57	64	66	

A Level Media Studies A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	30	27	37	31
Target %	94.9	95.9	95.9	95.9
Actual %	100	100	96.3	
Difference	+5.1	+4.1	+0.4	
NI Average for similar schools	76	79	82.4	

WHOLE SCHOOL

5+ A*-C GCSE

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No <u>WHOLE SCHOOL</u> . of students	284	250	199	226
Target	40	42	46	46
Actual	46	60	80	
Difference	+6	+18	+34	
NI Average for similar 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 <u>WHOLE SCHOOL</u> . of students	284	250	199	226
Target	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Actual	33	40	35	
Difference	--	--	--	
NI Average for similar schools	29	30	30	

2+ A-E GCE A LEVEL

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	132	136	138	126
Target	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Actual	88	93	92	
Difference	--	--	--	
NI Average for similar schools	94	93	N/A	

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