



*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 Malachy's College
Belfast**

December 2009

BACKGROUND

St Malachy's College took part in the first cohort of the specialist schools' project, with a specialism in Music. The school received a budget of £406,200 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' 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 December 2009, 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:

- take forward the dissemination of good practice in line with the SDP; and
- facilitate a closer relationship between information and communication technology (ICT), Music Technology and Moving Image Arts.

Based on three self-evaluation reports provided subsequently by the school to the Department, the Inspectorate continued to monitor the work and progress made by the school. This monitoring indicates that the school is addressing the above issues effectively through:

- the development of an effective system of rigorous self -evaluation well embedded within an SDP of a good quality; and
- a well-targeted intensive programme of staff development across all the subject departments.

The school's participation as a specialist school is a key driver for the school in maintaining and strengthening its focus on improvement.

The annex attached provides a summary:

- of the number of pupils studying the specialism of music and the standards they attained in the first three years of specialist status compared with grammar schools; and

- for the same period, of whole-school results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level examinations, compared with grammar schools of a similar type.

THE SPECIALISM

The annex shows that, with the exception of one year, the school met its attainment targets for the specialism over the designation period. The exception is accounted for by one pupil not achieving the expected grade.

The key strengths of the specialism include:

- the very good or outstanding quality of the lessons observed, including the very good ICT skills demonstrated by the GCSE and GCE A level pupils as they used a range of appropriate music software to compose their own music;
- the significant increase in the use of music technology by the pupils taking music throughout the school, facilitated greatly by the appointment of a new member of staff for music;
- the overall good levels of achievement in public examinations in music at both GCSE level and GCE A level;
- the variety of musical experiences and the quality of musical tuition provided which cater well for the range of musical abilities and interests of those pupils taking music, including those who are not taking public examinations in the subject; and
- the commitment to improvement of the head of department for music, particularly in his sustained focus on improving the links and communication with the local schools and the surrounding community.

The standards achieved in the specialism both in public examinations and in lessons observed were good. The school has demonstrated good improvement in the specialism across the school as a whole since the start of designation. Given that the uptake of the specialism at examination level has remained low, the school needs to increase further the number of pupils taking examinations at GCSE and GCE A level, and those taking tuition in music instruments in general, and focus sharply on this as a priority within the music specialism.

WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

Since the start of designation, the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C in seven or more subjects at GCSE including English and Mathematics has declined, being below the targets set by the school and the average for grammar schools in two of the three years of designation. In the first year of designation the results showed an improvement on previous years.

At GCE A level during the period of designation, results in the first year exceeded the target set, were an improvement on previous years, were above the average for similar schools, but have since declined. The school recognises, and senior management has taken as its main focus, the need to improve its examination results.

There is clear evidence that, as a consequence of its participation in the specialist schools' project, there is a marked improvement in quantitative analysis and self-evaluation. The school is setting targets in a much more informed, rigorous and effective manner and the heads of departments are taking decisive action through the SDP, in particular by identifying the strengths and needs for improvement of individual pupils, especially in their literacy and numeracy.

Taking into account the remedial action being taken the school has demonstrated that engagement with the specialist schools project has led to satisfactory developments in whole-school self-evaluation and improvement. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in effecting continued improvements.

THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The school is able to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence which demonstrates that it has developed very effective links with the local community, including the local primary schools and community groups.

The key strengths of the community plan are:

- the effective work carried out with the primary schools leading to demonstrable improvement in both the children's and their teachers' musical skills;
- the high levels of attainment and the well-developed interest in music of the primary school children who participated in the wide range of music schemes supported by the school;
- the improvements made, through the community plan in ensuring an effective transition for the children moving from key stage (KS) 2 into KS3;
- the effective work undertaken to provide music technology courses in the school well matched to the needs of adult learners in the community;
- the greatly increased opportunities for children in the linked primary schools to widen their musical experiences and perform in public; and
- the benefits for a significant number of pupils in St Malachy's College who have developed their wider skills of initiative and independence through their extensive engagement with the linked primary schools and other community groups.

The school has demonstrated outstanding 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 effective in supporting 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 developed well. In particular, there is evidence of excellent gathering and use of a wide range of quantitative and benchmarked information to inform the Principal, the senior management team (SMT) and the heads of subject departments where standards need to be raised. The school's participation as a specialist school is a continuing benefit in school improvement.

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

- the committed leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the Vice-principals and the school governors, who have well-founded plans for the further improvement of standards across all the subject departments;
- the excellent analysis and use of quantitative and benchmarked data to inform target setting and planning for remedial action; and
- the effective work in the specialism, and in the school generally, in eliciting feedback from the pupils and planning actions to develop the pupils' ability to take the initiative, set personal goals for improvement in their learning, and develop their independence and leadership skills.

To promote further improvements in the standards the pupils attain across the range of subjects the SMT needs to take vigorous action to ensure that teaching approaches continue to be adapted and improved where they need to be.

At the time of the Inspectorate's visit in December 2009, the school was using a detailed, well-informed SDP containing targets, implementation strategies and appropriate priorities for action, including the prospective one year extension of specialist status, which focuses on improving standards across a minority of underperforming subject departments.

CONCLUSION

In the specialist plan, the improvement in quality and standards is good, in the community plan it is outstanding and in the whole-school plan there is a satisfactory focus on improvement; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision.

The quality of the SDP is good. In its planning for 2010-11, the school 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 students so that it can demonstrate improvement for the investment. The Inspectorate recommends that the SDP for 2010-11 focuses strongly on the need to improve the standards achieved by the pupils in a minority of subjects, increase further the numbers taking music both at GCSE and GCE A level and in music tuition for musical instruments. The school should review the balance of the budget spent on the community aspects of the music specialism and the whole-school improvement aspect.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor closely the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

SPECIALISM**GCSE Music A*-C**

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	12	13	8	22
Target %	100	100	100	100
Actual %	83.3	100	100	
Difference	-16.7	0	0	
NI average for grammar schools	98.4	99.2	98.6	

A Level Music A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	5	7	7	10
Target %	100	100	100	100
Actual %	100	85.7	100	
Difference	0	-14.3	0	
NI average for grammar schools	95.5	93.9	95.1	

WHOLE-SCHOOL**7+ A*-C GCSE**

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	150	157	147	155
Target %	90	90	87	88.5
Actual %	88	85	82	
Difference	-2	-5	-5	
NI average for boys grammar schools	91	85	87	

7+ A*-C GCSE including English and Maths

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	150	157	147	155
Target %	88	88	85.5	87
Actual %	84	84	81	
Difference %	- 4	- 4	- 4.5	
NI Average for boys grammar schools	88	87	85	

3+ A Level A-C

	2007 Year 1	2008 Year 2	2009 Year 3	2010 Year 4
No. of students	113	129	114	116
Target	72	72	74	74.5
Actual	76	71	66	
Difference	+4	-1	-8	
NI average for similar grammar schools	75	71	75	

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