

***An Evaluation of the Implementation of the
NQ Curriculum in Post-Primary Schools
1998-1999***

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CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. FOREWORD	1
2. INTRODUCTION	2
3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	3
4. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRICULUM AND ITS ORGANISATION	7
4.1 AN OVERVIEW - OVERVIEW STATEMENTS	7
4.2 CURRICULUM POLICY	8
4.3 CURRICULUM PROVISION	8
4.3.1 Schools' Overall Planning	8
4.3.2 Requirements of the NIC for the Provision of Compulsory Contributory Subjects	9
4.3.3 Residual Time	9
4.3.4 Breadth	9
4.3.5 Balance	10
4.3.6 Progression	10
4.3.7 Organisation of Teaching Groups	10
4.3.8 The Curriculum for Pupils of Different Abilities	11
4.3.9 Disapplication	11
4.3.10 Fast Tracking	11
4.3.11 The Integration of the Educational Themes within the Curriculum	11
4.3.12 Vocational Elements of the Curriculum	12
4.3.13 Extra Curricular Activities	13

Section	Page
4.4 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING	13
4.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION	15
4.6 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT	16
4.7 THE SCHOOLS' VIEW OF THEIR OWN PROVISION	17
4.8 THE SCHOOLS' VIEW OF THE NIC FRAMEWORK	17
4.9 GENDER	18
4.10 LITERACY, NUMERACY AND ICT	18
5. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION	18
APPENDIX 1	21
APPENDIX 2	22

1. FOREWORD

1.1 This report presents the Inspectorate's findings of a survey of the implementation of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) within schools in the secondary sector. The report is based on evidence from the 45 schools listed in Appendix 1. The evidence was gathered by the District Inspectors (DIs) during planned district visits (DVs) to the schools. The visits took place during the first term of the 1998/99 academic year. During these visits, inspectors held discussions with principals, members of the senior management team (SMT), teachers and pupils; they observed 241 lessons in a range of subjects and examined curriculum documentation and samples of the pupils' work. The survey was also informed by a preliminary exercise in which curricular data from a sample of 48 schools was collected and analysed; of these schools, 39 were included in the DV survey.

1.2 This document indicates the features of the curricular provision in 1998-99 in the secondary sector; it also identifies priorities for action. In addition, it summarises (2.1), for comparison purposes, the main characteristics of the secondary curriculum as reported by the Inspectorate for the period 1986-1989. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and other interested bodies, may wish to refer to, contrast and reflect on both of these sets of findings as the review of the present curriculum progresses.

1.3 A key aim of the DV is to encourage and enable schools to monitor and evaluate aspects of their own work and thereby contribute to the raising of standards and to the dissemination of a culture of quality assurance and critical self-evaluation.

1.4 In order to provide information that might allow the Inspectorate to improve further the effectiveness of DVs, the participating schools were asked to evaluate the usefulness to them of the exercise. A copy of the evaluation form is included as Appendix 2. Thirty-nine returns were received - a response of 86%: all the returns indicated that the schools valued the DV and found it helpful as a way of reviewing aspects of their work. Features commonly reported as useful were:

- i. the immediate and useful feedback;
- ii. the encouragement to undertake school self-evaluation; and
- iii. the opportunity to develop further the links between schools and the DI.

Almost all of the schools which returned the questionnaire rated the procedures used in the DV as good; two schools rated them as neither good nor poor. A few schools suggested improvements, including:

- i. the need for a narrower focus for the DVs,
- ii. the allocation of more time for classroom visits, and
- iii. the provision of a brief written report for the board of governors (BoG) and for use by the school.

1.5 Certain quantitative terms are used in the report when commenting on aspects of the implementation of the NIC in the schools visited. In percentages, the terms broadly correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75 - 90%	-	most
50 - 74%	-	a majority
30 - 49%	-	a significant minority
10-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 An earlier report, issued by the then Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) in 1990, summarised the Inspectorate's findings on secondary education in Northern Ireland between 1986 and 1989. In referring to the first five years of secondary schooling, the report set out the following main characteristics of the curriculum and its organisation.

- i. Most schools had worked to develop curricular aims. These were generally appropriate, but they were reflected strongly in the life and work of only a minority of the schools; aims and practice were frequently seen in isolation one from the other.
- ii. Cross-curricular issues featured to an increasing extent in the schools' aims; in nearly half of the schools, however, the content of cross-curricular work was limited in scope and its implementation largely unco-ordinated.
- iii. The curriculum in the first three years offered a broad range of experiences; the most significant omission being a modern language (largely in the case of the less able pupils in secondary intermediate schools) and occasionally music. There was, however, a wide variation in the allocation in the time to the various subjects.
- iv. In the fourth and fifth years the range of experiences common to all pupils was narrow. In addition, the organisation of the subject options caused imbalance and a lack of coherence in the programmes of individual pupils in many schools. The major deficiencies were the omission of a modern language, the failure to provide a balanced science programme and the lack of emphasis on the creative and aesthetic areas of the curriculum.
- v. Less able pupils were frequently excluded from important areas of the curriculum and had inadequate access to others. In the courses provided for them there was often a poor match between the content and the needs of individual pupils.

2.2 The NIC was introduced in 1990. In the secondary sector, within an area of study framework, it took the form of detailed specifications for programmes of study (POS) in certain

subjects in key stage 3 (KS3) and KS4, educational (cross-curricular) themes and requirements regarding curriculum breadth in KS4. In response to criticisms about manageability, a review was carried out in 1994/95, and a modified curriculum came into effect in 1996.

2.3 This report describes and evaluates the curricular provision in KS3 and KS4 in 45 schools in the autumn of 1998. In coming to a view about the curricular provision, the inspectors considered a range of factors, including:

- i. the schools' curriculum policies and how they were determined,
- ii. the curriculum as timetabled by schools, including its breadth and balance,
- iii. the inclusion of the requirements of the NIC,
- iv. any differences in the curriculum provided to take account of the pupils' abilities or gender,
- v. the extent to which the educational themes (ETs) were integrated within the curriculum, and
- vi. the provision and uptake of extra-curricular activities.

In addition, the inspectors evaluated the quality of the pupils' experiences, and how schools monitored and evaluated their own provision and planned for curricular development. The schools' views of their own provision and of the NIC framework were also explored.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS (including Overview Statements 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3)

3.1 Ten of the schools showed significant strengths in their organisation of the curriculum; in 32 schools the strengths outweighed the weaknesses; in three schools the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. (4.1.1)

3.2 Four of the schools showed significant strengths in their integration of the ETs within the curriculum; in 20 schools, the strengths outweighed the weaknesses; in 19, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths; there were significant weaknesses in two schools. (4.1.2)

3.3 Of the two hundred and forty-one lessons observed during the DVs, most either showed significant strengths, or strengths outweighed weaknesses. (4.1.3 and 4.4.1)

3.4 Nearly all schools had a written curriculum policy or other relevant documentation. A minority of policies were under, or in need of, review. (4.2.1)

3.5 In the majority of schools, the policies were largely determined by the principal or the senior management or curriculum teams. In a significant minority of schools, there was widespread consultation with the teaching staff. The contribution of governors to the curriculum policies varied widely, from an active role in a minority of schools to little or no contribution in another minority. (4.2.3 and 4.2.6)

3.6 In a small number of schools, groups of pupils had been consulted about the curriculum. A minority of schools had been assisted by the Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in drawing up their whole-school curriculum policies. Only a minority of schools gave advice and comment on the teaching and learning strategies to be used to reflect the aims stated in their curricular documentation. (4.2.3 and 4.2.6)

3.7 All schools with KS3 pupils met the requirements of the NIC for KS3 pupils and nearly all schools did so for KS4 pupils. A small number of schools did not meet all of the requirements for all the pupils in KS4. (4.3.2.1)

3.8 The residual timetabled time¹, beyond that which was allocated for the compulsory contributory subjects, was used in a variety of ways. In KS3, a number of areas featured strongly, such as, information and communications technology (ICT) courses, an additional modern language or a pastoral programme. (4.3.3.1 and 4.3.3.2)

3.9 In KS4, the time remaining after the timetabling of the compulsory subjects and the pupils' optional subjects, varied widely, from none or very little, to sufficient to cater for the more extensive enrichment programmes provided by a small number of schools. The majority of schools provided discrete elements of pastoral or guidance programmes. (4.3.3.3)

3.10 In nearly all schools, the breadth of the curriculum offered to the pupils covered, or went beyond, the minimum NIC requirements. (4.3.4.1)

3.11 The schools' timetabled provision for modern languages was particularly varied; from all or a minority of pupils having little or no choice in the modern language studied in eight schools, to pupils having a wide choice of languages in a small number of schools. (4.3.4.2)

3.12 In KS4, in a significant minority of schools, the pupils took a range of subjects that resulted in a curriculum which was balanced well across the areas of study. Imbalances in other schools were due to a number of factors; for example, in a significant minority of schools these imbalances resulted from pupils spending at least 30% of their time on subjects from one area of study, most often science and technology. In a minority of schools, the creative and expressive area of study was under-emphasised, with insufficient time devoted to it. (4.3.5.1 and 4.3.5.2)

3.13 The range of subjects offered by the majority of schools allowed for appropriate progression in subject choice from KS3 to KS4. (4.3.6.1)

3.14 In a significant minority of schools, the variations in the curriculum for pupils of different abilities were pronounced and included differences in the choice of subjects offered, in the allocation of time to subjects, and in the courses followed. (4.3.8.2)

3.15 The large majority of schools included references to the ETs in departmental schemes of work. In a minority of schools, the individual departments had planned well to incorporate the ETs within their teaching programmes. The majority of schools, however, needed to involve better the departments and teachers in planning collaboratively the ET programme across the school or within specific departments. In general, the references to the ETs in whole-school and departmental documentation were brief, with little specific guidance on the teaching and learning

strategies to be adopted by teachers and pupils. (4.3.11.1)

3.16 A minority of schools had undertaken audits of all the ETs; in a minority of the remaining schools, audits had been carried out on a selection of the ETs, most often in ICT and careers. In a significant minority of schools, none of the ETs had been audited. In the majority of schools where audits had been done, there was little evidence of any effective use of the information gained to modify and adjust, if necessary, the schools' provision for the ETs. (4.3.11.2)

3.17 Most schools had appointed co-ordinators for a few, most, or all of the ETs; the number of co-ordinators appointed and the remit of their work varied widely. In most schools, the poor whole-school and departmental planning for the ETs prevented continuity and progression of the ETs, both within and across subjects. (4.3.11.3)

3.18 Most schools had timetabled classes for one or more of the ETs; careers education and ICT were, by far, the themes most commonly allocated specific time. A minority of schools provided health education lessons. (4.3.11.4)

3.19 In most schools, the ETs, notably ICT, were under-emphasised in teaching and learning within and across the subjects. Apart from careers and ICT, the pupils interviewed were largely unaware of the existence and purpose of most of the themes. (4.3.11.5)

3.20 The extra-curricular activities offered by the schools varied from very few to an extensive list; the majority offered a wide range. Sporting activities, which included team games, were prominent. A majority of schools provided some extra-curricular music or drama activities. (4.3.13.2)

3.21 A minority of schools reported that they needed, and were using, time beyond the timetabled day to teach the curriculum which they wanted to provide for their pupils, and a minority provided after-school or evening sessions for study, homework or revision. (4.3.13.4)

3.22 Lesson observation was an integral part of the DVs, and in the best practice seen, the pace of lessons was brisk and the teachers' use of whole-class teaching, group and individual work was appropriate. Commonly occurring strengths included frequent, and realistically challenging, opportunities for the pupils to:

- i. develop their initiative and independence during work that was well matched to their varying abilities;
- ii. develop important oral and literacy skills, particularly independent reading and writing;
- iii. develop study skills;
- iv. explore, investigate, make decisions and solve problems; and
- v. develop personal and inter-personal skills to enable them to contribute effectively as a member of a group.

Many of these strengths mirrored the important skills set out in the 'Characteristics of the Curriculum at key stage 3 and 4' section of the subject specifications². (4.1.3 and 4.4.1)

3.23 In a minority of the lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning observed demonstrated significant or predominantly significant weaknesses. Commonly occurring weaknesses included a lack of suitable challenge in the work provided and an insufficient development of the pupils' thinking and reasoning skills, and, in particular, of those same skills mentioned in 3.22 above. (4.4.3)

3.24 In the lessons observed, in specifically timetabled ICT classes, the computer was often used effectively as an aid to teaching and learning. In general, however, insufficient use was made of ICT, including the use of the computer, in other subjects. (4.4.5)

3.25 In a majority of schools, the SMT, including the principal, drew up the strategies for monitoring and evaluation; in only a minority of these schools was the SMT subsequently involved in any implementation or development of the strategies, such as the follow-up of any information gained from monitoring and evaluation. (4.5.1)

3.26 Most schools used, to varying degrees, the Computerised Local Administration System for Schools (CLASS), to monitor the standards being reached in public examinations. In a minority of schools, the range, depth and quality of information gathered, analysed and interpreted, including the use of CLASS for a range of purposes, notably staff development and improvement in learning, was excellent. Apart from analysing examination results, the majority of schools made little or no use of CLASS or other arrangements to monitor systematically, evaluate and make any necessary adjustments to the implementation of the curriculum; for example, in areas such as pupils' attendance, or making any necessary changes where analysis of examination results or other information showed that improvements were needed. (4.5.2)

3.27 A minority of schools made good use of the information which they gained from monitoring and evaluation to modify or adjust the curriculum which they provided. (4.5.4)

3.28 A majority of schools stated that, in addition to changes required by the introduction of the NIC, they had introduced other significant changes; these changes were mostly additions, but a minority of the schools had removed significant features, such as certain GCSE options, from their curriculum. In the majority of the schools, the reasons for making the changes had not been based sufficiently on first-hand, qualitative or quantitative information. (4.5.5)

3.29 In a minority of schools, most or all of the curricular priorities were well matched to the spending priorities. In a majority of schools, however, there was little evidence of schools matching their spending to their curricular priorities in a systematic or strategic manner. (4.6.1)

3.30 Most schools stated that the major strengths of their provision were their ethos and the provision of a broad and a balanced curriculum. (4.7.1)

3.31 A majority of schools said that there was nothing additional they would like to provide in their curriculum but were unable to do so. Most of the remaining schools reported that they would like to have made additional provision, such as, more ICT, extra GCSE subjects including drama, media studies and physical education (PE), or a vocational element for KS4 pupils. (4.7.2)

3.32 Almost all schools viewed the NIC framework positively and said that its fundamental structure was sound and workable. They argued very strongly that there should be no major changes to it, either in its structure or in any overall addition to its content. The most commonly mentioned advantages were the breadth, balance, and continuity provided by the overall framework and the programmes of study, and the equality of opportunity both for boys and girls and for pupils of different abilities. A significant minority of schools indicated that some important adjustments were necessary, particularly to give more flexibility of subject choice in KS4 and more effective arrangements for the teaching of the ETs. (4.8.1)

3.33 Other aspects of the curriculum, noted to widely varying degrees by the majority of schools as worthy of inclusion, but only if something else were to be removed, were: European awareness, environmental issues, citizenship, links with business, social, civic and political awareness, stronger emphases on a vocational/GNVQ component in KS4, personal and social education (PSE), and the Key Skills³. (4.8.2)

3.34 Most schools said there were no major deficiencies in the breadth and coverage of the various subjects as set out in the NIC programmes of study. However, where concerns were expressed, these related predominately to the science and technology area of study (AoS). A significant minority of schools expressed a strong view that the ETs were not being implemented effectively in their schools. (4.8.3 and 4.8.4)

3.35 The majority of the schools identified no major gender issues in relation to their curriculum. A significant minority, mostly co-educational schools, showed awareness of gender issues, most often relating to stereotypical subject choice. A minority of schools expressed concern about the low achievement of boys, or their predominance in lower-ability teaching groups in their school, and had taken remedial action. (4.9.1 and 4.9.3)

3.36 Principals and SMTs in the majority of schools were well aware of the implications of the recent initiatives on literacy, numeracy and ICT for teaching and learning in their schools. Most classroom teachers interviewed, however, had a much narrower awareness of these initiatives and of the need for any consequent necessary changes in teaching and learning. The majority of schools were considering the action needed; a minority were beginning to act on the recent initiatives, as set out, for example, in the School Improvement Programme launched in February 1998. (4.10.1)

4. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRICULUM AND ITS ORGANISATION

4.1 OVERVIEW STATEMENTS

4.1.1 Ten of the schools showed significant strengths in their organisation of the curriculum; in 32 schools, the strengths outweighed the weaknesses; in three, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths.

4.1.2 Four of the schools showed significant strengths in their integration of the ETs within the curriculum; in 20 schools, the strengths outweighed the weaknesses; in 19, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths; there were significant weaknesses in two schools.

4.1.3 Of the two hundred and forty-one lessons observed during the DVs, most either showed significant strengths or their strengths outweighed weaknesses.

4.2 CURRICULUM POLICY

4.2.1 Nearly all schools had a written curriculum policy or other relevant documentation. A minority of policies were under, or in need of, review; a small number of these policies pre-dated the introduction of the NIC and did not take into account its requirements.

4.2.2 The majority of the policies took sufficient account of the statutory requirements of the NIC and a significant minority also reflected the particular circumstances or ethos of the school. In a significant minority of schools, the policies covered comprehensively the taught curriculum, extra-curricular activities and pastoral matters. In eight other schools, the policies were written largely in broad and unhelpful terms, mainly stating an aim to provide a “broad, balanced and relevant” curriculum and little else to explain what this meant to the school.

4.2.3 A small number of schools included a variety of other matters in their policies. These matters varied widely from school to school and included aspects such as: providing broadening and enriching experiences; preparing pupils for adult and working life; and developing pupils’ thinking and decision-making skills. Only a minority of schools, however, gave advice and comment on the teaching and learning strategies to be used to reflect the aims stated in their curricular documentation.

4.2.4 In a significant minority of schools, there was widespread consultation with the teaching staff in drawing up the curriculum documentation. In the majority of schools the policies were largely determined by the principal, the SMT, or a group of teachers with a particular responsibility for curriculum matters, with little or no involvement of other staff. The majority of schools need to improve this aspect of their communication and consultation arrangements.

4.2.5 The contribution of governors to the curriculum policies varied widely. Governors played an active role in drawing up the curriculum policy in a minority of schools. In a further twelve schools, the BoG had been informed about, and contributed to the ratification of, curriculum policies. In eleven schools, governors made little or no contribution to curriculum policy. The majority of schools need more effective arrangements to improve this part of their involvement with governors.

4.2.6 In a small number of schools, groups of pupils had been consulted about the curriculum, for example, by survey or through a pupils’ council. In one school, a survey of the pupils’ views led to changes in the organisation of the languages provision. A minority of schools had been assisted by CASS in drawing up their whole-school curriculum policies.

4.3 CURRICULUM PROVISION

4.3.1 Schools’ Overall Planning

4.3.1.1 The majority of the schools had given considerable thought to decisions about their curriculum framework and organisation. Such consideration was reflected in, for example, the extent of the debate about curriculum issues, the work of curriculum groups, the regularity and

effectiveness of review, the use of curriculum audits, the action flowing from discussion, the coherence of the resulting curriculum, or the detail of the school development plan. A significant minority of other schools showed less comprehensive or strategic thinking. In these schools, developments tended to be largely reactive or piecemeal, or/and there were key curricular issues requiring attention.

4.3.1.2 In a minority of schools, the principals were newly in post and were in the early stages of developing new approaches to their review and development of the curriculum. In a small number of schools the curriculum was being managed in the context of significant reductions in pupil enrolment and in staffing.

4.3.2 Requirements of the NIC for the Provision of Compulsory Contributory Subjects

4.3.2.1 All schools with KS3 pupils met the requirements of the NIC to provide the compulsory contributory subjects for KS3 pupils, and nearly all schools did so for KS4 pupils. A small number of schools did not meet all of the requirements for all of the pupils in KS4. In each of these four schools, the provision for certain KS4 pupils was deficient in one area of study; the deficiencies included no provision for a modern language, or for a subject from the environment and society area, or for regularly timetabled PE.

4.3.3 Residual Time¹

4.3.3.1 A minority of schools had a clear rationale for their use of residual timetabled time. This time was used in a variety of ways to broaden the pupils' programmes, to help them to consolidate or develop necessary skills.

4.3.3.2 Certain areas were covered frequently in schools' residual time in KS3. Over 60% of the schools provided courses to develop the pupils' skills in using ICT. An additional modern language and pastoral programmes each featured in about half of the schools. Over a quarter of the schools included periods for drama and for library skills.

4.3.3.3 In KS4, the time remaining after the timetabling of the compulsory subjects and the pupils' optional subjects, varied widely, from none or very little, to sufficient to cater for the more extensive enrichment programmes provided by a small number of schools. The programmes provided in this small number of schools involved the pupils in selecting, over the two-year period of KS4, modules such as art, music, drama, aspects of ICT, health education, home economics, media studies, business enterprise projects, traffic education and leisure activities. The majority of schools provided discrete elements of pastoral or guidance programmes, most commonly taught through the use of form, pastoral and social education (PSE) or careers periods.

4.3.4 Breadth

4.3.4.1 In nearly all schools, the breadth of the curriculum offered to the pupils, covered, or went beyond, the minimum NIC requirements. The very wide range or number of subjects taken by the pupils in a small number of schools placed significant demands on the school and/or the pupils; for example, the range on offer resulted in some very small GCSE classes, or in pupils being entered for up to twelve GCSEs.

4.3.4.2 The schools' timetabled provision for modern languages was particularly varied. In eight schools, all or a minority of the pupils had little or no choice in the language which they were studying; the reason commonly given for this was that only one language was available throughout the school, or to those pupils identified by the school as lower-attaining. By contrast, in a small number of schools, the pupils had a wide choice of languages; for example, in two schools the pupils had an unrestricted choice of any two languages from the four offered in KS3.

4.3.5 Balance

4.3.5.1 In KS4, in a significant minority of schools, the pupils took a range of subjects that resulted in a curriculum which was balanced well across the areas of study. Imbalances in other schools were often due to the pupils spending at least 30% of their curriculum time in KS4 in one area of study, notably in the science and technology area of study in grammar schools. For example, in a significant minority of schools, mostly grammar schools, some or all of the pupils took combinations of GCSE subjects such as double award science and technology; or biology, chemistry and physics; or biology, chemistry, physics and technology. Similar allocations of time occurred in the environment and society area of study, or in modern languages, in a small number of schools. Whilst fulfilling the NIC requirements, these combinations, when timetabled by the schools, could result in one area of study accounting for about up to 40% of the pupils' available timetable.

4.3.5.2 In a minority of schools, the creative and expressive area of study was under-emphasised, with sufficient time devoted to it.

4.3.6 Progression

4.3.6.1 The range of subjects offered by the majority of schools allowed for appropriate progression in subject choice from KS3 to KS4. In a minority of schools, progression was not possible in subjects such as drama, French or music because these subjects were not available throughout KS4 to certain pupils who had studied them in KS3, and may have wished to continue these studies in year 11 and year 12.

4.3.7 Organisation of Teaching Groups

4.3.7.1 The schools organised their teaching groups in a great variety of ways. The majority used combinations of methods such as mostly unstreamed classes with setting only for mathematics, to more complex arrangements, such as streaming in KS3 with certain classes regrouped for practical subjects, and an ordering of ability bands in KS4 within which teaching groups were mixed or set in different ways depending on the subject. A minority used a single method of organisation throughout the school; most of these schools either banded the pupils, or left classes unstreamed; a minority streamed or set the pupils across the year groups.

4.3.7.2 Almost all of the schools which gave their reasons for their organisation of teaching groups, just under half the schools visited, linked their decisions about teaching groups to the range in the ability of the pupils in the school. Bands, sets and streams were used to help to narrow the range of the ability of the pupils within teaching groups, and to aid teachers in catering for the pupils' differing needs. For example, bands containing lower attaining pupils had smaller classes and pupils received additional support, or classes of differing abilities entered different

external examinations. Arguments advanced by a small number of schools for keeping classes as mixed as possible included allowing year 8 pupils to integrate into a new school, and enhancing the pupils' self-esteem.

4.3.8 The Curriculum for Pupils of Different Abilities

4.3.8.1 In a minority of schools, all of the pupils, irrespective of their abilities, were offered the same curriculum. In a significant minority of other schools, there were slight differences in the curriculum taken by pupils of different abilities; in almost all of these instances, the higher-attaining pupils were able to take extra subjects such as an extra modern language, or GCSE Additional Mathematics, or GCSE English literature.

4.3.8.2 In a further significant minority of schools the variations in the curriculum for pupils of different abilities were pronounced. These variations included: differences in the choice of subjects offered to different bands of pupils, upper bands tending to be given a greater choice of subjects; lower bands following different courses in certain subjects including non-GCSE programmes; differences in the time allocated to certain subjects such as modern languages; lower bands having additional support in certain subjects such as English or mathematics. Such distinctions between the curriculum of the majority of pupils and that of the lower-attaining pupils were particularly marked in two schools; in these schools, aspects of the curricular provision were not well thought through.

4.3.9 Disapplication

4.3.9.1 In a small number of schools, parts of the curriculum were disappplied for a small number of pupils who had a physical disability, attended school irregularly, or attended a special unit.

4.3.10 Fast Tracking

4.3.10.1 In a minority of schools, more often grammar schools, varying numbers of pupils took some GCSE examinations earlier than their peers. Such 'fast tracking' occurred in the majority of instances in mathematics, or, in a significant minority of instances, in modern languages. More able pupils were entered for GCSE mathematics in year 11; subsequently, they either took GCSE Additional Mathematics in year 12 or repeated their GCSE mathematics to improve on their first grade. In two schools, pupils who had received their primary education through the medium of Irish, took GCSE Irish early.

4.3.11 The Integration of the Educational Themes within the Curriculum

4.3.11.1 The large majority of schools included references to the ETs in departmental schemes of work. In a minority of schools, the individual departments had planned well to incorporate the ETs within their teaching programmes; in seven of these 12 schools the individual departments were also involved in planning the overall ET programmes across the schools. The majority of schools, however, needed to involve better the departments and teachers in planning collaboratively the ET programme across the school or within specific departments. In general, the references to the ETs in whole-school and departmental documentation were brief, with little specific guidance on the teaching and learning strategies to be adopted by teachers and pupils.

4.3.11.2 A minority of schools had undertaken audits of all the ETs. In a minority of the remaining schools, audits had been carried out on a selection of the ETs, most commonly, ICT, followed by careers education, health education, cultural heritage and economic awareness, with EMU the least commonly audited. In a significant minority of schools, none of the ETs had been audited. With the exception of ICT, where audits had been done, most of the review work had been carried out around the time of the initial implementation of the NIC. In the majority of schools where audits had been done, there was little evidence of any effective use of the information gained to modify and adjust, if necessary, the schools' provision for the ETs.

4.3.11.3 Most schools had appointed co-ordinators for a few, most, or all of the ETs; the number of co-ordinators appointed and the remit of their work varied widely. In a minority of the schools, the planning to ensure continuity and progression of the pupils' experiences of the ETs was good. In one school, for example, succinct, helpful policy documents, and effective identification and monitoring of ETs within and across departments, helped to ensure continuity and progression; departmental schemes of work provided clear guidance for the implementation of the ETs in lessons, and there was evidence that the teaching programmes had been altered in the light of the information gained from the audits. This good practice was, however, not common across the schools visited. In most schools, the poor whole-school and departmental planning for the ETs prevented continuity and progression of the ETs, both within and across subjects.

4.3.11.4 Most schools had timetabled classes for one or more of the ETs. While the ETs that had timetabled classes varied across schools, some patterns emerged. Careers education and ICT were, by far, the themes most commonly allocated specific time; a majority of schools provided time for ICT and a majority for careers, in either or both KS3 and KS4. Of the remaining themes, a minority of schools provided health education lessons, most often incorporated within their PSE programme, and one school allocated time for the pupils' development of economic awareness. A small number of schools reported their intention to use the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment's (CCEA's) accreditation in Computer Competence in Information Technology (CCIT) at the end of KS3 to promote the use of ICT across the subjects.

4.3.11.5 In a minority of schools, there was evidence of the ETs, including ICT, strengthening the quality of the work in classrooms across a wide range of subjects. In a further minority of schools, the ETs, including ICT, supported the quality of work in a small number of subjects. In most schools visited, the ETs, notably ICT, were under-emphasised in teaching and learning within and across subjects. In most schools, different pupils experience the ETs to degrees that vary too widely. A wide range of subjects contributed to varying extents to the implementation of the themes, with no clear pattern emerging as to which subjects contributed most to the various themes. The interviews conducted with pupils indicated that, apart from careers and ICT, the pupils were largely unaware of the existence and purpose of the ETs. The evidence from the DVs clearly indicates that most pupils do not have a systematically arranged and consistently implemented ET programme, including ICT, across and within the subjects.

4.3.12 Vocational Elements of the Curriculum

4.3.12.1 A minority of the schools offered a discrete vocational element to their KS4 curriculum. Seven of these schools provided GNVQ courses, most often in business. Other provision included:

- i. courses leading to an initial award in caring services and to a diploma in vocational guidance,
- ii. programmes for joinery and catering,
- iii. business, enterprise and environmental projects, and
- iv. work experience for lower-attaining pupils on one day each week throughout the year.

In three instances, the vocational provision utilised links with the further education sector; in one of these cases, the pupils did not have the minimum statutory length of school day when the link occurred.

4.3.13 Extra-Curricular Activities

4.3.13.1 A minority of schools stated their rationale for the provision of activities beyond the timetabled day: the reasons given included the desire to reflect the school ethos, to extend the pupils' learning experiences, or to help to consolidate or develop the pupils' personal and social skills.

4.3.13.2 The extra-curricular activities offered by the schools varied from very few to an extensive list; the majority offered a wide range, with one school listing 45 activities available to the pupils. Sporting activities, which included team games, were prominent: other more individual physical activities, less frequently mentioned, were golf, hill walking and swimming. A majority of schools provided some extra-curricular music or drama activities, such as, choir, orchestra, brass or folk groups, a drama club, a school show or play, or the preparation of pupils for feis events. One school held its own drama festival.

4.3.13.3 Extra-curricular activities mainly took place at lunchtime or after school. Only a small number of schools reported that the introduction of the NIC had reduced the scope of extra-curricular activity; two other schools reported that following an initial reduction, their level of provision was being restored. In the 25 schools where the level of uptake was explored, most reported that the extra-curricular activities were supported well by the pupils. A minority of these schools stated that the arrangements for pupils who travelled to school by bus, limited, to some extent, opportunities for those pupils to take part in after-school activities; however, only two schools reported that it was a major problem.

4.3.13.4 One school indicated that it had lengthened its school day to accommodate the statutory curriculum. A minority of schools reported that they needed, and were using, time beyond the timetabled day to teach the curriculum which they wanted to provide for their pupils, such as taught programmes for GCSE Additional Mathematics, drama or physical education. A minority of schools provided after-school or evening sessions for study, homework or revision.

4.4 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

4.4.1 Of the two hundred and forty-one lessons observed during the DVs, most either showed significant strengths or their strengths outweighed weaknesses. In the best practice seen,

relationships between the pupils and the teachers were characterised by mutual respect, the pace of lessons was brisk and the teachers' use of whole-class teaching, group and individual work was appropriate. Commonly occurring strengths, observed in the best practice, included frequent and realistically challenging opportunities for the pupils to:

- i. develop their initiative and independence during work that was well matched to their varying abilities;
- ii. develop important oral and literacy skills, particularly independent reading and writing;
- iii. develop study skills;
- iv. explore, investigate, make decisions and solve problems; and
- v. develop personal and inter-personal skills to enable them to contribute effectively as a member of a group.

Many of the strengths noted in the lessons observed mirrored the important skills set out in the 'Characteristics of the Curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4' section of the subject specifications². In a significant minority of the lessons seen, however, the teachers need to act on the guidance, as set out within the subject specifications² in the section "Characteristics of the Curriculum at KS3 and 4", to inform better and to improve their classroom practice.

4.4.2 During the DVs, many lessons were observed where the features outlined in 4.4.2 were incorporated effectively into teaching and learning. For example, in a GCSE science class in a non-selective school, the pupils worked at various times as a whole class, as individuals and in small groups during well-integrated experimental and theoretical activities. The work was realistically challenging, was well planned and managed by the teacher, and the pupils reached good standards. Likewise, in KS3 physical education classes in a non-selective school, the pupils developed independence and good oral skills as they experimented and worked in pairs to design dance routines. In mathematics in a selective school, the pupils developed well their skills of independence as they investigated the concept of probability and acquired key mathematical process skills. In a non-selective school, the lessons observed in history and mathematics included effective whole-class teaching strategies and provided good opportunities for the pupils to develop a wide range of oral skills. In an art and design class in a non-selective school, the work was characterised by a brisk but realistic pace, skilful teacher demonstration and succinct and clear exposition; the pupils then worked on their individual projects with a clear sense of purpose and enjoyment and were well supported with individual advice. In English, geography and history classes seen in a selective school, the well-planned development of the pupils' independent writing skills was integrated effectively within the content of the subject being studied.

4.4.3 In a minority of the lessons seen, the quality of teaching and learning observed across a range of subjects weaknesses outweighed strengths or there were significant weaknesses. Commonly occurring weaknesses included a lack of suitable challenge in the work provided and an insufficient development of the pupils' thinking and reasoning skills, and, in particular, of those same skills mentioned in 4.4.1 above.

4.4.4 Less effective lessons which were observed included, for example, a lesson in French which did not challenge the pupils, where insufficient use was made of the target language, and low standards were achieved in speaking and writing; in a science lesson, investigative skills were poorly developed, with the pupils remaining largely passive for the duration of the lesson, spending too much time copying information into notebooks; a minority of the lessons seen in English and mathematics were over-directed with too much use of textbooks and worksheets, and few opportunities for the pupils to engage in extended oral discussion.

4.4.5 In the lessons observed, in specifically timetabled ICT classes, the computer was often used effectively as an aid to teaching and learning. In general, however, insufficient use was made of ICT, including the use of the computer, in other subjects.

4.4.6 There was considerable variation in the quality of the marking of the pupils' work; the marking was most effective where the teachers provided the pupils with useful oral and written feedback which enabled them to improve their performance.

4.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

4.5.1 In a majority of schools, the SMT, including the principal, drew up the strategies for monitoring and evaluation; in only a minority of these schools was the SMT subsequently involved in any implementation or development of the strategies, such as the follow-up of any information gained from monitoring and evaluation. In a minority of schools, the principal alone, or the principal and the vice-principal together, were involved in the initial planning and the carrying out of the strategies for the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum. In a minority of schools, staff drawn from a much wider base of the SMT, heads of departments (HoDs) and individual teachers were consulted and subsequently involved in the development and implementation of these arrangements. The majority of schools need more effective arrangements than presently exist for this aspect of their management and development.

4.5.2 Most schools used CLASS to varying degrees to monitor the standards being reached in public examinations. Apart from using CLASS to analyse examination results, the majority of schools had very few or no other arrangements to monitor systematically, evaluate, and make any subsequent adjustments to the implementation of the curriculum; for example, in areas such as pupils' attendance, or making any necessary changes when the analysis of examination results showed improvements were needed. A minority of schools employ a well-conceived and wide range of strategies, including the extensive use of CLASS, to monitor and evaluate, with a view to improvement, the effectiveness of their statutory and non-statutory curricular practice. These strategies allow for a systematic review and appraisal of the curriculum policy, organisation and learning outcomes for the pupils. In these schools, the range, depth and quality of information gathered, analysed and interpreted, including the use of CLASS for a range of purposes, notably to inform staff development and strategy related to improvement in learning, was excellent. Their strategies included:

- i. the systematic use of CLASS for monitoring a range of indicators, usually examinations and attendance patterns,
- ii. the observation of lessons, by a range of staff (principal, HoDs, peer observation),

iii. the use of questionnaires with pupils, teachers and/or parents.

4.5.3 An additional significant minority of schools made increasing use of CLASS for the analysis and discussion of examination results within and across departments.

4.5.4 A minority of schools made good use of the information they gained from monitoring and evaluation to modify or adjust the curriculum they provided. For example, three of the schools adjusted the teaching and learning in their French programmes because of low GCSE results and concerns raised in questionnaires which they had sent to the parents and pupils. Two other schools removed two subjects from their GCSE option choices, after their scrutiny of examination results, using CLASS, revealed poor results over a number of years. Another school increased the regularity of homework following concerns expressed by parents in the questionnaires. However, the majority of schools do not benefit from the information which they gain from monitoring and evaluation to modify or improve their curriculum in a systematic, planned or considered way.

4.5.5 A majority of schools stated that, in addition to changes required by the introduction of the NIC, they had introduced other significant changes. Most of these schools stated they had made important additions to the curriculum. For example, three schools had introduced GNVQ Part I courses to allow alternative routes to GCSE study, and four schools had introduced post-16 GNVQ studies. Three schools had introduced a second modern language in KS3. Three schools had introduced GCSE media studies, while a further two introduced modules on study skills. Only a minority of the schools which made changes reported that they had removed significant features from their curriculum. Most of these schools had dropped some GCSE options, such as computer studies, geology, economics and Additional Mathematics; one school had removed post-16 studies. The reasons reported for these changes to the curriculum outside the NIC requirements varied widely; in the large majority of cases, however, the reasons given involved the school reacting to pressures from within or outside the school. Reasons for change reported by schools included, for example, pressure from HODs or from parents, or competition from other schools. There was little evidence of these changes having been made as a result of a systematic review of the school's provision. In the majority of the schools the reasons for making the changes had not been based sufficiently on first-hand, qualitative or quantitative information.

4.6 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

4.6.1 A significant minority of schools had clearly set out the spending priorities in their development plans. Furthermore, in a minority of schools, most or all of the curricular priorities were well matched to the spending priorities, which most often included staff recruitment, deployment, staff development and resources. In an additional few schools, a small number of the curricular priorities listed were aligned well with spending priorities. In a minority of schools, no mention was made of spending priorities in development plans. In a majority of schools, however, there was little evidence of schools matching their spending to their curricular priorities in a systematic or strategic manner. In a small number of schools there was no evidence of a link between curriculum and budgetary planning.

4.6.2 A small number of schools were developing performance indicators (PIs) which they intended to use to assess the influence of their spending on their curricular priorities. These PIs

varied across the schools but included, for example, patterns of change in pupils' uptake of subjects, the percentage of pupils completing courses, and improvements in examination results which followed extra spending in particular curricular areas.

4.7 THE SCHOOLS' VIEW OF THEIR OWN PROVISION

4.7.1 Most schools stated that the major strengths of their provision were their ethos and the provision of a broad and a balanced curriculum, including the statutory requirements for KS3 and KS4. A minority of schools indicated that their pastoral system was a major strength, while a small number highlighted their sporting achievements. A minority of schools did not list their strengths when asked, or state their curricular or extra-curricular priorities for development.

4.7.2 A majority of schools said that that was nothing additional they would like to provide in their curriculum but were unable to do so because of internal or external constraints. Of the remaining schools, nine noted that they would like to provide more ICT work but were constrained by a lack of suitable accommodation and/or hardware; five wished to add GCSE subjects to their curriculum including drama, media studies and PE; three others wished to add a vocational element for KS4 pupils.

4.8 THE SCHOOLS' VIEW OF THE NIC FRAMEWORK

4.8.1 Almost all schools viewed the NIC framework positively. They listed a range of significant advantages that the overall framework and programmes of study provided; most commonly mentioned were the breadth, balance, and continuity from KS3 to KS4, and the equality of opportunity both for boys and girls and for pupils of different abilities. They argued very strongly that the fundamental structure of the NIC with its framework of AoSs, subjects and ETs, was sound and workable and that there should be no major changes to it, either to the structure or in any overall addition to its content.

4.8.2 However, a significant minority of schools indicated that there were weaknesses in aspects of the NIC that needed to be addressed. In particular, they argued that some important adjustments were necessary in order to allow more flexibility of subject choice in KS4, especially in the science and technology area of study, to make more effective arrangements for the implementation of the ETs within the various subjects, and to reduce further the paperwork associated with the assessment arrangements in KS3 and KS4. A number of aspects were noted as worthy of inclusion, but only if something else were to be removed; a strong view was expressed that otherwise the curriculum would be overloaded; the aspects mentioned, to widely varying degrees by the majority of schools, were European awareness, environmental issues, citizenship, links with business, social, civic and political awareness, stronger emphasis on a vocational/GNVQ component in KS4, PSE, and the Key Skills³.

4.8.3 Most schools said there were no major deficiencies in the breadth and coverage of the various subjects as set out in the NIC programmes of study. However, some concerns were expressed, mainly about the science and technology area of study. In particular, a minority of schools, mostly grammar schools, expressed concern that KS4 pupils could not choose two subjects from biology, chemistry and physics as an alternative to double award science. In addition, a few non-selective schools expressed reservations about the suitability of the content of the CCEA GCSE technology and design examination for less able students, as the only available

choice for technology within the NIC framework.

4.8.4 A significant minority of schools expressed a strong view that the ETs were not being implemented effectively in their schools within the NIC framework. In particular, the teaching of the ETs was fragmented within and across subjects, often depending unduly on the differing emphasis given by individual teachers or HoDs; the evidence from class visits supports this view.

4.9 GENDER

4.9.1 The majority of the schools identified no major gender issues in relation to the curriculum. A significant minority of the schools, mostly co-educational, showed awareness of gender issues; in most instances, these related to the pupils' choice of subjects for KS4. The most common differences were the male domination of technology and design and the under-representation of boys in home economics; in contrast, a minority of other schools reported more positive developments in these subjects. There was a range of other subjects, each mentioned by a small number of schools, where either males or females were under-represented. There was evidence that a few schools encourage more open and informed choices, for example, by offering technology and design in more than one option group, and clearly identifying role models or career opportunities for the pupils.

4.9.2 Problems relating to access to subjects or extra-curricular activities were less common, occurring in only a small number of schools. Where such issues occurred they included option blocks which set subjects like child-care, and technology and design, directly against each other, and the lack of opportunity for boys to study home economics until year 12.

4.9.3 A minority of schools expressed concern about the low achievement of boys or their predominance in lower-ability teaching groups in their school, and had taken remedial action.

4.10 LITERACY, NUMERACY AND ICT

4.10.1 Principals and SMTs in the majority of schools were well aware of the implications of the recent initiatives on literacy, numeracy and ICT for teaching and learning in their schools. Most classroom teachers interviewed, however, had a much narrower awareness of these initiatives, and of the need for any consequent necessary changes in teaching and learning. The majority of schools were considering the action needed; a minority were beginning to act on the recent initiatives in literacy, numeracy and ICT, as set out, for example, in the School Improvement Programme launched in February 1998. In a minority of schools, for example, literacy and numeracy co-ordinators have been appointed with a clear working brief, and all the staff have recently discussed how best to promote literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum; the discussion has taken place in individual departments and at a whole-school level, and subsequent targets have been set for improvement. A small number of schools had not considered the implications of the initiatives for their schools.

5. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

5.1 This report indicates that there is much good practice in schools in the organisation and implementation of the NIC. There is, however, room for improvement in a number of

important aspects of provision and practice. In particular, there are important issues that need to be addressed in the planning for, and teaching of, the educational themes (5.2vii.) and important skills (5.2v.).

5.2 To improve further the quality of educational provision for pupils in the secondary sector, teachers and schools, the ELBs' CASS services and CCEA should reflect on to what extent, and how, they might best address the following priorities for action.

- i. The majority of schools need to involve the teaching staff and governors more closely in drawing up their curriculum policies or other relevant documentation.
 - ii. In their curriculum and monitoring and evaluation policies, or other related documentation, schools need to give more guidance on the teaching and learning strategies to be used to translate their aims into practice.
 - iii. A small number of schools need to provide all of the requirements of the NIC for all of the pupils in KS4.
 - iv. A significant minority of schools need to ensure a balanced curriculum for all pupils; certain pupils spend about 30-40% of their curriculum time in KS4 in one area of study, markedly so in the science and technology area of study in grammar schools.
 - v. There needs to be a greater emphasis on the development of the following important skills for the pupils:
 - thinking and reasoning skills;
 - oral and written communication skills;
 - initiative and independence; and
 - personal and inter-personal skills.
 - vi. More schools need to make more use of CLASS, not just to analyse examination results, but also to carry out a systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum, and, in the light of the information gained, to modify or adjust the curriculum provided.
 - vii. Most schools need to ensure a better continuity and progression in the pupils' experiences of the ETs, through a more systematically arranged and consistently implemented ET programme, particularly ICT, across and within subjects.
 - viii. Principals and senior managers need to ensure that all teachers:
 - know the implications of the recent initiatives on literacy, numeracy and ICT for their work;
 - and consider any consequent changes needed in teaching and learning.
-

6. IN CONCLUSION

6.1 The previous decade has brought important benefits to the pupils in relation to the curriculum, particularly in terms of equality of access. For example, the identification of compulsory contributory subjects, within an area of study framework, has ensured that the breadth of curriculum experienced by the pupils is no longer left to chance; subjects such as home economics and technology which previously were offered on a single-sex basis are now equally accessible to boys and girls alike; in contrast to the position where some schools offered no science at all, and had not the facilities to do so, all schools now offer a balanced science programme to their pupils, and have the capacity to do so, supported by the funding made available within the education reform programme for improvement in science accommodation; the study of a modern language at KS3 and 4 is an integral part of the curriculum, and gains have been made too, however modest in some schools, in relation to enriching the core curriculum through the provision for the educational themes.

6.2 Clearly, these developments have posed challenges to teachers as individuals, and even a degree of upheaval to schools as organisations: new subjects, or/and the need to give broader access to them, have led, in some schools, to teachers of certain subjects being re-trained and re-deployed, and to timetabling reviews and re-organisation, for example; refurbishment work, or conversions of classrooms and, at times, additional building work, to suit the demands of the changed curriculum, have posed temporary logistical problems for schools; in addition, there have been other significant changes to which the teaching profession has had to respond, in relation, for instance, to assessment, and recording and reporting the progress of individual pupils, and to issues linked to pastoral care.

6.3 Throughout this shifting educational environment, teachers have worked hard to bring about improvements in the interests of the pupils. Already many are engaging vigorously and positively in renewed educational debate as to the continuing appropriateness or otherwise of certain features of the NIC in the context of the new century, and CCEA is currently undertaking the preparatory work for a curriculum review.

6.4 As this report has shown, there have been important achievements since the Inspectorate published its previous report on secondary education in 1990. The findings of this survey are intended not only to help to inform deliberations about the future curriculum, but, in the shorter term, particularly through the section above 'Priorities for Action', to inform also all those who can influence, for the better, the quality of the experiences and the standards of achievement of the pupils in our schools today.

- 1 *Residual time: Time beyond that allocated for the NIC compulsory, contributory subjects.*
- 2 *("Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets", Department of Education, Northern Ireland, July 1996)*
- 3 *Key Skills: Communication, Application of Number, Information Technology, Working with others, Improving Own Learning and Problem-Solving.*

Appendix 1

Aquinas Grammar School, Belfast
Integrated College, Dungannon
Ballyclare Secondary School
Belfast Boys' Model School
Belfast High School
Bloomfield Collegiate, Belfast
Carrickfergus College
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Belfast
Clounagh Junior High School, Portadown
Coleraine High School
Comber High School
De La Salle Secondary School, Downpatrick
Dominican College, Belfast
Dominican College, Portstewart
Fort Hill College, Lisburn
Foyle and Londonderry College
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
Kilkeel High School
Killicomaine Junior High School, Portadown
Lagan College, Belfast
Laurelhill High School, Lisburn
Limavady High School
Lismore Comprehensive School, Craigavon
Little Flower Girls' School, Belfast
Loreto Convent Grammar School, Omagh
Magherafelt High School
Portadown College
Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards
St Colm's High School, Draperstown
St Colman's High School, Strabane
St Columbanus High School, Bangor
St Columb's College, Londonderry
St Comhghall's High School, Lisnaskea
St Dominic's High School, Belfast
St Fanchea's College, Enniskillen
St Genevieve's High School, Belfast
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel
St Olcan's High School, Randalstown
St Patrick's Boys' HS, Omagh
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick
St Patrick's High School, Ballymena
The Royal School, Dungannon
Thornhill College, Londonderry
Victoria College, Belfast

SCHOOL DISTRICT VISITS IN CURRICULUM (1998/99)

Name of School: _____ Reference Number: _____

Do you feel that:

1. The purpose of the District Visit was clear? Yes No
2. The requests for information created reasonable demands on the school? Yes No
3. The Curriculum was an issue of sufficient importance for the District Visit? Yes No
4. The District Visit was helpful to you as a way of reviewing aspects of your school's work? Yes No
5. The time spent on the District Visit was valuable to the school? Yes No
6. In terms of professional value to the school, how would you rate the procedures of the District Visit? *Please tick one box.*

Good Neither Good Nor Poor Poor

7. We would welcome any additional comments you may wish to make on the existing practice and future potential of the District Visit to help us review and develop our procedures.

Signed _____ Date _____

Please return the completed form to:

Mrs E Wells
Inspection Services Branch
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road, Bangor
Co Down, BT19 7PR

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