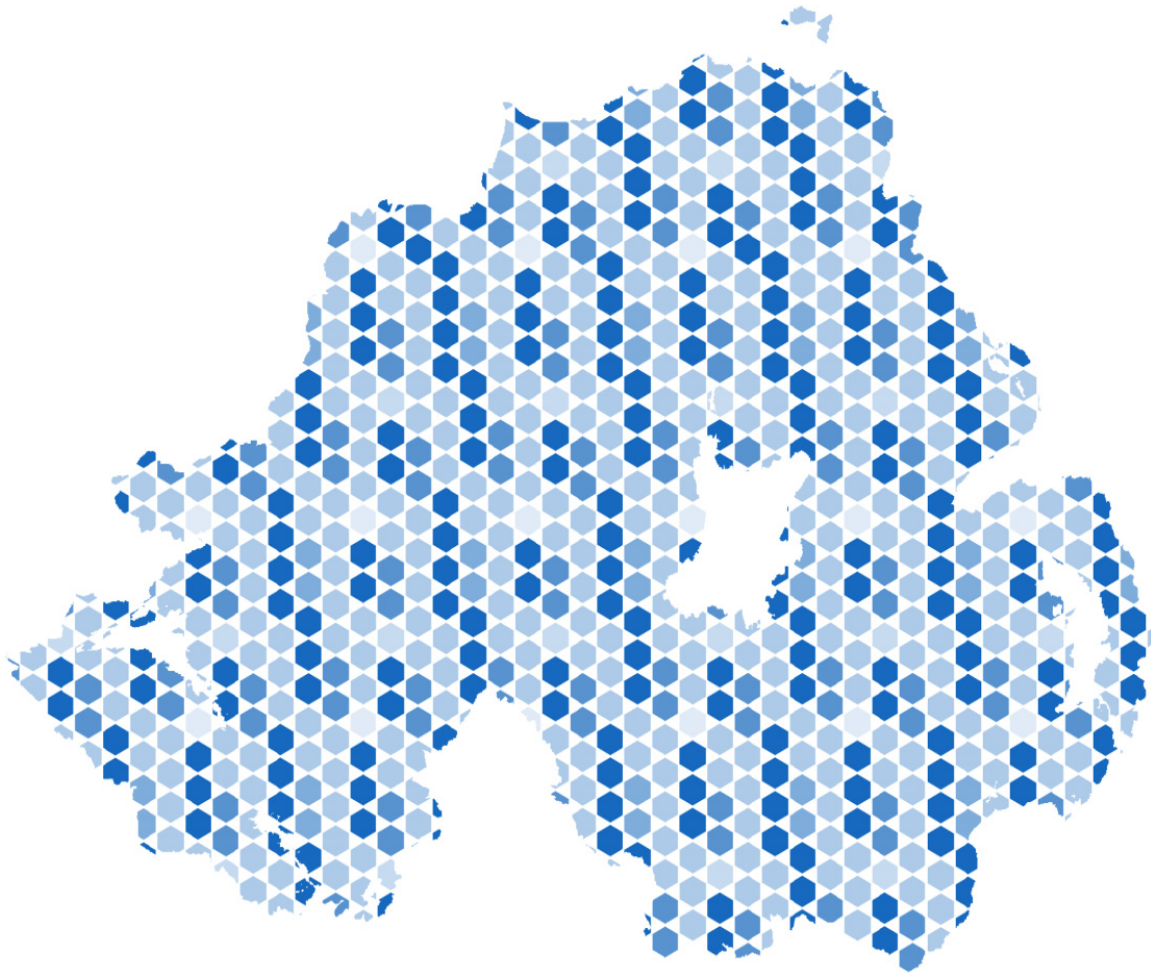


# SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Knockevin School,  
Downpatrick

Report of an Inspection  
in May 2011



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Knockevin School was built in 1994 and provides education for 89 pupils, aged three to nineteen years, who have severe learning difficulties and statements of special educational needs (SEN). Approximately 30% of the pupils have complex medical, physical and/or learning needs and require specialist teaching intervention and constant individual care assistance to access an appropriate curriculum.

The school's catchment area is wide and extends across a radius of 30 miles from Downpatrick, including Kilkeel, Newcastle, Castlewellan, Saintfield, Ardglass and Ballynahinch. The Principal was appointed to the school six months prior to the inspection after a period of fifteen months in an 'acting' position. The new Vice-principal, also in an 'acting' position for eighteen months, was appointed just three weeks before the start of the inspection.

Enrolment trends in the school have continued to grow over the last five years. Given the South-Eastern Education and Library Board's (SEELB) current directive on appointments, five of the teaching staff have temporary contracts. This situation creates difficulties for the management of the school in the delegation of curricular responsibilities and staff retention.

### **1.2 FOCUS OF THE INSPECTION**

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- pastoral care and wellbeing; and
- leadership and management at all levels across the school.

## **2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION**

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory.

### **2.1 The main strengths of the school include:**

- the pupils' good achievements in social, pastoral and academic learning;
- the very good and better quality of the teaching in some 40% of the lessons observed; and
- the very good level of continuous individual care assistance provided by the staff, and their strong commitment to and concern for the welfare of the pupils.

### **2.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:**

- clarify and develop the management structure, to focus more sharply on the priorities for improvement in the school development plan;

- develop a more rigorous system for planning, monitoring and evaluation across the whole school; and
- enable whole school discussion and dissemination of best practice across the school.

### **3. THE VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF AND GOVERNORS OF THE SCHOOL**

3.1 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and safeguarding included the opportunity for the parents and the staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the older pupils. The numbers of questionnaires issued, returned and containing written comments are given in Appendix 1.

3.2 The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents are very supportive of the life and work of the school; they regard highly the school's efforts to develop the children's personal and social qualities and ensure their well-being. In particular, the parents acknowledged the happy and caring ethos in the school and the hard-working and approachable Principal and staff.

3.3 Almost all of the responses from the staff questionnaires were very positive. They acknowledged the strong sense of team-work and collegiality throughout the school.

3.4 The governors acknowledged their strong appreciation of, and support for the leadership of the school. They recognised the challenges facing the new senior management team, and the warm and supportive environment created by the staff for the pupils. In particular, they mentioned the lack of adequate classroom space, leading to the necessity of using the social concourse area as a classroom for the older pupils. The inspection endorses the governors' view that this situation is disruptive to the learning for this group of pupils.

3.5 The older pupils talked enthusiastically about their friendships in school and the fun and enjoyment of school life. They enjoy participating in sports and in the range of programmes available to them, in particular, the school trips and work experience placements. The pupils appreciate the secure and caring approach of the teachers and classroom assistants and feel safe and secure in school. They know where to seek help if concerned.

3.6 The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal and the governors the findings from the questionnaires.

### **4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION**

#### **4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

The achievements and standards attained by the pupils are good.

In this report, the standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and their special educational needs.

From the youngest classes, the pupils are developing well their social skills. As they move through the school, they are given good opportunities to interact and develop appropriate social skills, engage in purposeful discussions to improve their talking and listening, work on their own or in teams across the subjects, and develop independence and self-confidence.

The pupils in the senior school, for example, are well motivated; a majority have clear views on what they want to achieve after school. They enjoy the opportunities to participate in the courses provided at the local Further Education (FE) College and can apply competently the learning they have attained in a range of settings. The school choir for example, provides a welcome opportunity for the pupils to enjoy singing together and performing for audiences both inside and outside the school.

Nine senior pupils are involved in work experience within the school environment and in the local community. The staff works hard to secure a range of supportive and appropriate work placements. The pupils value highly the quality of these experiences and the good relationships which they enjoy with the placement employers. The senior pupils, accept responsibility readily, demonstrate very good levels of commitment to their working environments and are excellent role models for the younger pupils.

Academic achievements are good and a majority of the pupils gain accreditation in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) modules suitable to their level of ability (see Appendix 2). In this academic year, the pupils who were entered for ASDAN modules completed these with 100% pass rate. The school needs, however, to extend the choice of courses and accreditation opportunities to challenge further the abilities and interests of a minority of the senior pupils.

During the inspection, those pupils with complex learning difficulties and disabilities responded considerably to the variety of sensory activities and structured help provided by the staff. The pupils were observed vocalising, giving eye contact, pointing, and showing facial expressions and movements to indicate their pleasure, sense of well-being and choices of preferred activities.

Those pupils who find it difficult to settle, are easily stressed in the classroom setting and whose behaviours challenge the staff, are very well guided to engage positively in activities of their choosing. In this endeavour, the skilled and expert support from the external professionals of the Middletown Autism Centre provides much needed input with good outcomes.

Among the pupils' achievements are:

- their active involvement in the sensory learning activities and the positive outcomes gained as a result;
- the strong work ethic, particularly of the older pupils, who demonstrate pride in their achievements, and are learning well to work together, take on responsibility and participate willingly in school-based and external work experiences;
- their steadily improving confidence, independence, motivation and self-esteem; and
- the pupils' good progress in a range of accredited courses.

## 4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

### 4.2.1 STANDARDS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the provision for learning in the school is good.

The quality of teaching in the school varies widely from satisfactory to outstanding and is mostly of a good quality. Almost 75% of the lessons observed during the inspection were of a good or better quality, and 40% were judged to be very good or outstanding. In just over 25% of the lessons, there was a need for significant improvement. The examples of very good teaching need to be disseminated more effectively across the school.

In the practice where the needs of the pupils are met most effectively, the tasks set are challenging and lead to measureable outcomes. The work planned for pupils with complex needs, for example, is of a high quality and is solidly underpinned by comprehensive assessment practices, well-constructed individual programmes and practical, purposeful activities which encourage the pupils to interact and communicate. In the most effective practice, information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to enhance and support teaching and learning. The school, however, is not adequately resourced for ICT. Access to suitable and relevant ICT, such as interactive whiteboards and assistive technologies, is limited.

In the less effective practice, lessons are satisfactory but could be improved in terms of appropriate challenge, relevance and interest. In these lessons, the pupils were restless and disengaged, and opportunities to extend learning were missed.

### 4.2.2 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The work is guided by a comprehensive range of appropriate policies which ensure that pupils feel safe and their concerns are listened to. The school has a very caring ethos and strong commitment to the welfare of the pupils and the staff. The pastoral support provided by the staff is characterised by a strong emphasis on meeting the individual needs of the pupils. The pupils' achievements are celebrated regularly and rewarded by certificates and performances. The school has recently introduced a new approach to the personal development and mutual understanding curriculum (PDMU) which addresses relevant teenage issues in a meaningful context suited to the age and ability of the pupils. There is a strong emphasis on the development of personal and social skills that encourages the pupils to accept individual responsibility and increase independent learning. An additional feature of the very good pastoral care is the effective contribution of the school nurse in the PDMU programme. The school has established effective links with other schools and community organisations which enable the pupils to develop their social skills and to build their social competence.

### 4.2.3 SAFEGUARDING

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding the children and young people. These arrangements reflect fully the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

The main performance indicators of the quality of the provision are:

- the examples of very good to outstanding teaching, where the very good pace of lessons is sustained and the activities are lively and engaging;



- the good skills demonstrated by the teachers to encourage the pupils to talk and to extend their conversations;
- the strong sense of collegiality within the classroom teams;
- the very good ethos and pastoral support demonstrated in the school's strong commitment to the welfare of the pupils and staff;
- the important impact of the therapists to support the work of the teachers and classroom assistants;
- the good range of extra-curricular activities; and
- the good organisation of work experience opportunities for the pupils.

#### 4.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management of the school is satisfactory.

The recently appointed Principal leads and manages the daily routines and organisation of the school effectively and efficiently; she has a clear view of the actions needed to improve the management structures to focus more sharply on monitoring and evaluation.

The systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is an area which the senior management team (SMT) needs to develop significantly, particularly to provide a means for staff discussion and dissemination of best practice. The staff has demonstrated a willingness to work collaboratively in this regard and there is ample evidence of aspects of the work of individual teachers which could provide the platform to achieve this and to create a robust whole school evaluation system.

The current school development plan (SDP) does not meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations. With a new management structure in place, it is now a priority that the Principal, with the new SMT, should renew the SDP in collaboration with all staff to guide the future development of the school.

The temporary position of five members of staff is a further issue which needs to be addressed to provide greater staff stability and deployment of duties. The school should negotiate with the SEELB to address the adverse impact of this situation for teachers affected by the current arrangements.

### 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the pupils' good achievements in social, pastoral and academic learning;
- the very good and better quality of the teaching in some 40% of the lessons observed; and
- the very good level of continuous individual care assistance provided by the staff, and their strong commitment to and concern for the welfare of the pupils.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- clarify and develop the management structure, to focus more sharply on the priorities for improvement in the school development plan;
- develop a more rigorous system for planning, monitoring and evaluation across the whole school; and
- enable whole school discussion and dissemination of best practice across the school.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the pupils are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

<b>PARENT QUESTIONNAIRES</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires issued</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires returned</b>	<b>Percentage returned</b>	<b>Number of written comments</b>
Parents	87	39	45%	28

<b>STAFF QUESTIONNAIRES</b>	<b>Number of questionnaires returned</b>	<b>Number of written comments</b>
Teachers	11	2
Support Staff	15	0

**DETAILS OF COURSES****ASDAN Modules 2009-2010**

21 pupils completed ASDAN Modules	
8 pupils completed Residential Experience Challenge .....	TISM35
7 pupils completed Money .....	TISM12
7 pupils completed Popular Culture .....	TISM18
2 pupils completed Everyday Living (PMLD) .....	TISM04
4 pupils completed Multi-Sensory Experience (PMLD) .....	TISM43

**ASDAN Modules 2010-2011**

15 pupils completed ASDAN Modules with 100% pass rate.

The levels of help varied from no help to gestural help.

8 completed Time management .....	TISM44
8 completed The Wider World .....	TISM46
7 completed Going to college .....	TISM07
7 completed Recognising and using everyday signs .....	TISM22
14 completed Pottery and ceramics .....	TISM19
14 completed Photography and multimedia .....	TISM45
14 completed Meal preparation and cooking .....	TISM11

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