



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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**Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**Strabane Academy
Co Tyrone**

December 2014

FOLLOW-UP TO THE BASELINE INSPECTION OF STRABANE ACADEMY, CO TYRONE, BT82 8NW (241-0311)

The baseline inspection of Strabane Academy, carried out in November 2012, followed the merger of Strabane Grammar School and Strabane High School in September 2011 on a split site. The baseline report highlighted a range of strengths in the pastoral care, the support for pupils with special educational needs, and the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance. The inspection evaluated the overall quality of provision as satisfactory and the report put forward 13 recommendations to help support the merger process more effectively¹.

The areas for improvement included the need to work collegially to meet the needs of all pupils more effectively and raise standards particularly at GCE level by: raising expectations; improving aspects of teaching and learning; using data more effectively; and enhancing planning, monitoring and evaluating in order that agreed actions lead to improvement.

Since the inspection the school has received extensive support from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) of the Western Education and Library Board (WELB), including direct support for the senior leadership team. Following a request from the school, the WELB CASS will be providing guidance and support for the English department.

The school's action plan has taken appropriate account of the areas for improvement and has informed the school development plan². Two interim follow-up visits (IFUVs) were completed in October 2013 and May 2014 and the follow-up inspection (FUI) took place in December 2014.

As part of the follow-up inspection, there was an opportunity for all staff to complete a confidential questionnaire. A majority of the teachers (22) and a very small number of the support staff responded and agreed or strongly agreed with a majority of the aspects surveyed. They report that they are well aware of the school's procedures for child protection/safeguarding; they communicate well with parents and set high standards for the pupils' learning. Approximately one quarter of the teachers had concerns with the effectiveness of the leadership and management at all levels, communication within the school and the level of resources. Almost two-fifths of the teachers included written comments expressing concern about the stress they feel because of the travelling between the two sites and, consequently, the shortage of time to prepare for lessons and to respond to management's email requests.

The most important actions taken, since the baseline inspection, to move the merger forward, include:

- more effective use of data by teachers to track pupil progress, identify underachievement and set department and whole-school targets;
- review and revision of the Positive Behaviour policy;
- the formation of key stage and whole-school student councils;

¹ More details on the focused actions recommended is given in the November 2012 report which is available at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-post-primary/inspection-reports-post-primary-2013/standard-inspection-strabane-academy.pdf>

² The SDP complies with the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

- greater time allocated to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator to carry out responsibilities;
- scheduled careers classes and an opportunity for work placement provided for all year 12 pupils;
- a review of key stage (KS) 4 curriculum, with three pathways designed to meet the needs of all the pupils;
- improvement in IT systems on both sites; and
- a process through which staff timetables are reviewed and revised.

The school's self-evaluation of staff wellbeing identified continuing stress, associated with travel between the two school sites. The school's timetable was reviewed this year by a WELB officer to ensure that it was efficacious.

At the time of the original inspection, 59% of year 12 pupils obtained grades A* to C in at least 5 subjects, including English and mathematics, which was 6 percentage points above the school's target and in line with the NI average for all year 12 pupils.

In 2014, 66% of the pupils attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, and 52% attained five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C. While the former was 4 percentage points above the school's target, the latter was 6 percentage points below. Both percentages were also below the NI averages for all year 12 pupils.

In 2014, 31% of the pupils entitled to free school meals attained grades A* to C in five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics. This was 8 percentage points below the 2014 NI average for all year 12 pupils entitled to free school meals.

At the time of the original inspection, 63% of year 14 pupils obtained grades A* to C in at least 3 GCE A-Level subjects. In 2014, the percentage was 67% which is an increase of 4 percentage points and is just above the 2014 NI average for all year 14 pupils.

In the lessons observed during both IFUVs and the FUI, the quality of the learning and teaching ranged from outstanding to satisfactory, with nearly two-fifths being very good or better. In the most effective practice, there were good working relationships, the pace and challenge was appropriately high, the teachers used suitable approaches to engage pupils, and the work of the classroom assistants supported well the pupils' learning. In the less effective practice, there was too much teacher direction and there were missed opportunities to consolidate and extend the pupils' learning.

The most important improvements since the baseline inspection include:

- the commitment of the staff, particularly the senior leadership team to, and the progress made in, merging the work of the two schools and building a single identity for the new school;
- the improvement in the pupils' behaviour arising from the care and support of all the staff;
- the many aspects of self-evaluation, particularly the use of surveys of pupils, parents and teachers;

- the effective use of data to inform the monitoring and evaluation of the pupil's learning;
- the progress made by the science department in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the baseline inspection; and
- the increased proportion of year 14 pupils achieving three grades at A* to C at GCE A-Level.

In addition to the need to address the continuing difficulties arising from the split site, there remains the need to:

- improve the standards achieved by all the pupils in public examinations, particularly at GCSE level; and
- develop further the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the learning and teaching in order to effect improvement in the experiences and outcomes for the pupils.

It continues to be important that the WELB and governors plan for, and manage, issues related to the school's budget, in order to address the future needs of the pupils and the staff of the school as it continues to operate on two separate sites.

Conclusion

The progress made in addressing the recommendations identified in the baseline inspection report has been good. ETI acknowledges the hard work and commitment of all the staff in what has been achieved and their identification of what still needs to be done to continue to move the merger forward.

Overall the quality of education provided by the school remains satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision.

The FUI has identified areas for improvement in standards, and in monitoring and evaluation processes, which need to be addressed if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the pupils.

The ETI will carry out a further follow-up inspection in 12-18 months and a report will be published.

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