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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

**Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



Education and Training Inspectorate

**Monkstown Community School and Learning
Support Centre, Newtownabbey**

Inspection Letter

April 2012

**INSPECTION OF MONKSTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND LEARNING SUPPORT
CENTRE, NEWTOWNABBEY (321-0200) - 30 APRIL-2 MAY 2012**

INSPECTION LETTER

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) notified Monkstown Community School of its forthcoming inspection scheduled for week commencing 30 April 2012. Prior to the inspection, the school informed ETI that one-third of the senior leadership team and two-thirds of its teaching staff would not be co-operating with Inspectors on advice from one of the teaching unions. These teachers are involved in action short of strike in relation to pay, pensions, terms and conditions of employment and reductions in the education budget.

The Inspectors were able to:

- observe learning and teaching in a small proportion of lessons;
- evaluate the quality of samples of the pupils' work in a minority of subjects;
- scrutinise some of the school's documentation, and the planning for a minority of curricular areas;
- evaluate the quality of provision for, and the standards attained in, geography;
- evaluate to a limited extent some aspects of the provision for English, mathematics and careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG);
- analyse and report on the school's performance in public examinations over the past three years;
- meet with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14 to discuss the arrangements for safeguarding, pastoral care and careers guidance;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding;
- hold discussions with the Principal and the two Vice-principals regarding leadership and management, the school's improvement planning processes, pastoral care, safeguarding, curriculum provision, standards, accommodation and finances;
- meet representatives of the Board of Governors to hear their views on the life and work of the school, and to discuss their role in supporting and promoting school improvement;
- discuss with a minority of staff their actions to bring about improvement, including departmental self-evaluation;
- report to the Principal and representatives of the governors the key messages from the small number of parents, teaching staff and support staff questionnaires which were returned; and
- observe the pupils' behaviour inside the school building and outside in the school grounds.

Owing to the non co-operation of one-third of the senior leadership team and two-thirds of the teachers, the Inspectors were not able to assess fully the quality of education provided for the pupils to identify areas where provision is strong or where improvements are needed.

The Inspectors were not able to:

- evaluate the quality of leadership and management at all levels;
- observe and evaluate the quality of the learning and teaching in a majority of the classes;
- evaluate the quality of planning for most of the curricular areas;
- evaluate how effective the assessment arrangements are in promoting learning;
- evaluate the quality of the provision for the pupils who attend the school's Learning Support Centre;
- assess the overall quality of the working relationships between the pupils and the staff;
- observe directly the majority of the pupils at work or to talk to them about their work;
- evaluate the extent to which the majority of the pupils acquire and develop effective personal and social skills, dispositions and capabilities;
- evaluate the quality of the care, guidance and support, including the pastoral care provision and the provision for those pupils with special educational needs;
- evaluate the progress being made towards the implementation of the Entitlement Framework and the quality of the curriculum provision at key stage (KS) 3, key stage 4 (KS4) and post-16; and
- evaluate most aspects of the provision for English, mathematics and CEIAG.

CONTEXT

The enrolment of Monkstown Community School has declined over the past two years and stands currently at 651; there are 20 pupils in the sixth form. Approximately 28% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school identifies 23% of the pupils as having special educational needs, including 36 pupils with statements, most of whom are enrolled in the school's Learning Support Centre (LSC). There are 17 newcomer pupils. The Principal has been in post for six months at the time of the partial inspection.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

ETI was able to evaluate the school's standards in public examinations.

The standards attained by the pupils at General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) are unsatisfactory. Over the past three years there has been a significant decline in the proportion of pupils achieving five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, at grades A*-C. In 2011, only 12% of the pupils achieved five or more subjects, including

English and mathematics; this is significantly below the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals band. In addition, the performance of just over three-quarters of the individual GCSE subjects, at grades A*-C, is below the corresponding three-year NI average, and more than three-fifths of subjects are more than ten percentage points below the average. The percentage of pupils who attained no qualifications at GCSE level or equivalent in 2011 is 4%, well above the average of 0.7% for similar schools.

The standards attained by the pupils at GCE A2 level, in the few subjects offered, are satisfactory. Over the past three years, there has been a small number of pupils in year 14, ranging from nine pupils to 16 pupils. The school has offered only two subjects at A2 level in at least two of the last three years. The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A* to C in three or more subjects at GCE A Level over the past three years has fluctuated from significantly below to above the NI average for similar schools in two of the last three years. A minority of the pupils progress from A2 study to higher education.

The school has identified appropriately the urgent need to raise further the pupils' levels of attainment, particularly at GCSE level.

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The quality of provision in geography is satisfactory¹.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the partial inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The school needs, however, to address:

- the training of the recently appointed deputy designated teacher; and
- the clarification of roles and responsibilities for staff and pupils in light of the school's current review of the safeguarding policy.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The previous school development plan (SDP) concluded in June 2011; there is currently no SDP in place to guide the work of the school. During his six months in post, the Principal has carried out a useful needs analysis. He has begun a process of self-evaluation and consultation with teachers, parents and pupils to identify the key priorities for the new SDP, set to begin in the next academic year, with a clear focus on raising standards. The partial inspection endorses this as a crucial action; it is vitally important that school development planning, supported by appropriate action planning, is initiated urgently in order to set a clear direction and effect school improvement.

There is good use made of the available accommodation. The accommodation is well maintained, and the school is well resourced to meet the curricular and social needs of the pupils.

It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school's sixth form provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

¹ For detailed findings in the provision of geography, see Appendix 1.

CONCLUSION

The school's inspection is incomplete. ETI will return as soon as possible, and with little or no additional notice, to complete the inspection and to issue a full published report. This will include undertaking the evaluation of all of the aspects of provision which were not possible to evaluate during this incomplete inspection.

ETI has reported the findings in this letter to the Board of Governors, the Principal and a representative of the Employing Authority.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECT UNDER FOCUS

GEOGRAPHY²

The quality of the provision for geography at KS3 is satisfactory.

The strengths include:

- the good working relationships between the pupils and teachers in the geography lessons observed;
- the good quality planning for KS3, developed by the recently appointed head of department, which provides opportunities for the pupils to explore a broader range of suitable and relevant geographical topics;
- the effective use of ICT to support the pupils' learning;
- the commitment of the departmental team to review and improve the provision for geography; and
- the effective leadership of the head of department, including the good start made to monitoring and tracking the pupils' progress in geography.

The areas for improvement are to:

- improve the overall quality of the teaching and learning, particularly the use of assessment for learning strategies; and
- develop more fully the processes for self-evaluation to inform the specific actions needed to improve further the standards achieved by the pupils.

² There is currently no key stage 4 or post-16 provision for geography in the school.

APPENDIX 2

The arrangements for the inspection included:

- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire to the inspection;
- meetings with representatives from the governors; and
- meetings with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	142	18	12.7	8
Teachers	----	9	----	*
Support Staff	----	2	----	*

* = fewer than 5

---- = unknown due to action short of strike

The responses from the parental questionnaires returned were highly affirmative about most aspects of the work of the school. The parents commented positively on their general satisfaction with the quality of the pastoral care and support provided for their children. The small number of returns from the questionnaires completed by the teachers and support staff were generally positive. The ETI reported to representatives of the governors and the Principal the few areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

The pupils with whom discussions were held talked positively about the helpful and supportive teachers, their active involvement in the School Council and their enjoyment of a range of extra-curricular activities. The pupils reported that they feel safe and that there are members of staff they could speak to if they had any concerns about their safety or well being.

The governors reported their commitment to seeing standards raised in all areas of the life of the school, particularly to improving the standards attained in most subject areas. They spoke positively of the work of the Principal and all of the staff, particularly the members of staff who have developed links with the local feeder primary schools and the youth club. They expressed concern about low attendance rates by governors at the Board of Governors' meetings.

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