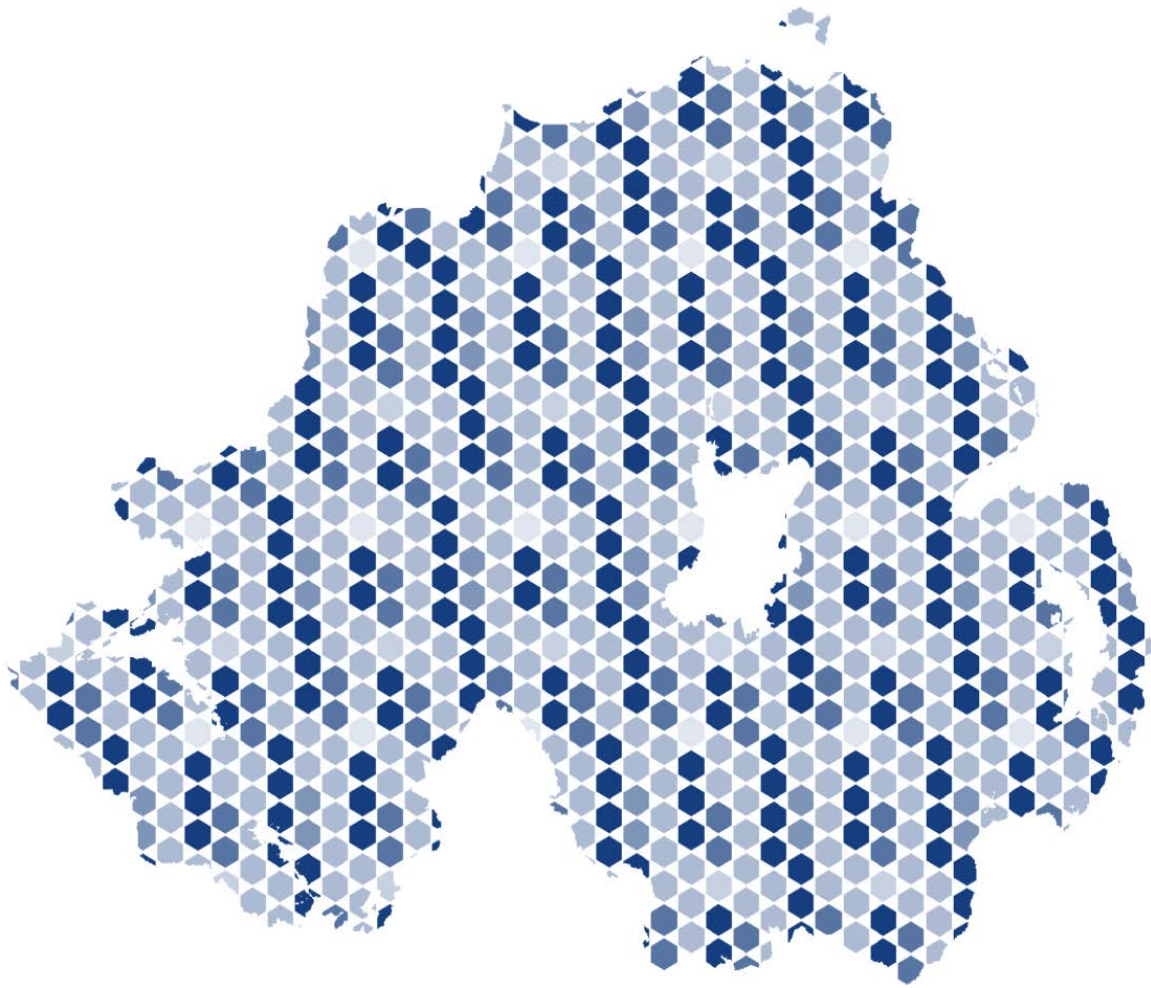


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Rathfriland High School,
Co Down

Controlled, co-educational, 11-16, non-selective

Report of an Inspection in
April 2015

eti

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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms

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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of post-primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation, data and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils (individually and in groups) teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire. Any significant issues, relevant to the inspection, raised are reviewed by ETI with the governors and senior leaders.

Around 15% of parents (37) and 92% of staff (36) responded to the questionnaires. All of the staff who responded commented positively on: the caring, supportive atmosphere in the school; the good opportunities to be involved in continual staff development; and the opportunities to be involved in self-evaluation and development planning. Almost all of the parents who responded were very positive. In particular, they reported on how well the staff support the care, dignity and well-being of their child. The small number of concerns raised in the questionnaires was discussed with the principal and governors.

2. Focus and purpose of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of a post-primary inspection is, through an effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the pupils;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

3. Context of the school

Rathfriland High School is an 11-16 non-selective co-educational school, drawing upon pupils from the town and the outlying rural community, stretching as far as Newry and Banbridge. The school is the choice for a wide range of abilities and the enrolment is consistent, currently standing at 309 pupils. Over the past four years, the number of pupils entitled to free school meals has increased and presently stands at 22.5%. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs has increased slightly and currently stands at approximately one-fifth. The school enjoys support from the parents and is widely used as a resource by the local community in the evenings and at weekends.

Rathfriland High School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	55	71	46	63
Enrolment	296	311	298	306
% Attendance (NI Average)	92.1% (91.4%)	92.9% (91.3%)	93.7% (92.0%)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ¹	16.5%	16.7%	13.8%	22.5%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	16.5% (49)	16.4% (51)	18.4% (55)	20.9% (64)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	21	19	18	18
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the Learning Support Centre (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
No. of newcomers	0	0	*	*
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	23.6%	26.7%	4.3%	3.1%
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	29%	38%	8.6%	4.7%
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	76.3%	95.7%	78.2%	61.9%
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	76.3%	83%	67.3%	57.1%
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Provision	Very Good
Leadership and Management	Very Good

5. Quality of achievement and standards

- The pupils are enthusiastic, have high levels of self-esteem and their behaviour is exemplary. They respond maturely to peer-assessment opportunities, work well independently and manage their learning successfully in a variety of contexts. The pupils have well-developed personal and social skills, including team-working, leadership and mentoring; they are well-prepared to contribute responsibly to the community and for the next stage of their education or life in the work place.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

² From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression in Communication and Using Mathematics and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years

- The results in public examinations at KS4 are strength of the work of the school. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE examination or equivalent at grades A* to C has been consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. When English and mathematics are included, the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent is similarly well above the NI for non-selective schools.
- In English, the pupils achieve high standards at GCSE, with the three year average for English Language at grades A* to C being significantly above the NI average for similar schools; those pupils who are entered for GCSE English Literature also achieve very well, with the three year average at grades A* to C being nearly ten percentage points above the NI average for similar schools.
- The standards achieved in mathematics at GCSE grades A* to C are very good and significantly above the average for non-selective schools, although the curricular offer at KS4 for the more able pupils is too limited.
- The school's internal and external data indicates that the pupils with special educational needs achieve well and follow suitable careers pathways that enable them to progress to further education, work-based learning (training) or employment.
- The attainment of the very small number of year 12 pupils entitled to free school meals has dropped over the last three years and is below that of their peers. Although the numbers are small this needs to be addressed by the school.

6. Quality of provision

- A coherent, whole-school approach to planning, learning and assessment has been established. In almost all of the lessons observed during the inspection, planning, teaching and assessment were effective (good or better) in promoting learning. The most effective practice, in most of the lessons observed, is characterised by: skilful questioning to promote and progress the pupils' learning; involvement of the pupils in the negotiation of success criteria for the intended learning outcomes; promotion of literacy, numeracy and higher level thinking skills; appropriate, well-planned pair and group work enabling the pupils to learn with and from one another; and the very good range of assessment strategies used, including self and peer assessment, to support well the pupils' learning and to inform future planning. It will be important to further disseminate the best practice already existing in the school, to ensure consistently high quality learning experiences for all of the pupils.
- Within English, the teaching and learning was effective in supporting the pupils' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and higher level thinking skills; a range of well-conceived active learning strategies and the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) were employed to stimulate, engage and challenge the pupils.

- Through English and across the curriculum, there is a clearly established focus on the development of the pupils' literacy skills and in particular writing. Through consistent and effective use of appropriate strategies and success criteria the pupils have meaningful opportunities to write in a range of forms and for a variety of audiences and purposes. While talking has been used well to develop their writing skills, pupils at Key Stage (KS) 3 and beyond would now benefit from more opportunities across the curriculum to develop and apply their understanding of effective talking and listening along with presenting for a range of purposes and to a variety of audiences.
- In mathematics, in most of the lessons observed the teaching and learning was effective (good or better). In just under one-quarter of the lessons observed, it was very effective (very good or better). In these lessons, the pupils were highly motivated and engaged, they were articulate when asked to explain and justify their thinking and they had excellent opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. In a minority of the lessons, the lack of challenge for the more able pupils was an area for improvement. The department has appropriately identified as a priority the need to review the planning for learning at KS3 in order to build on and extend the pupils' prior mathematics learning and numeracy skills acquired in KS2.
- A school numeracy strategy has raised the profile of numeracy as a cross-curricular area. It provides teachers with guidance for the promotion and teaching of numerical skills and a notable strength is the weekly whole-school numeracy focus. However, the opportunities for, and the effectiveness of, the development of the pupils' numeracy skills varies overly from subject to subject. To further improve the pupils' numeracy skills, the numeracy co-ordinator needs to evaluate the impact of the strategy and share the very effective practice which exists in a small number of departments with teachers across the school.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. The school's motto "big enough to deliver, small enough to care" is evident in all aspects of school life. A strong sense of community exists in the school, underpinned by a distinctive caring and supportive ethos. All of the staff are highly committed to the care and well-being of the pupils and there are excellent working relationships at all levels. The pupils are well-motivated, very welcoming and confident; they are very proud of their school and engage easily with visitors. A whole-school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour develops the pupils' resilience and encourages them to achieve their best. Through a number of forums, including the class councils, the views of the pupils are sought, valued and used to inform developments in the school's provision. The varied range of activities provided beyond the classroom helps the pupils to develop their talents and contributes very well to their personal and social development.
- The school has a very inclusive approach to special educational needs provision. The pupils who require additional support with learning develop their confidence and social skills in a caring learning environment. The pupils' specific needs are identified at an early stage and appropriate intervention strategies are in place. The pupils achieve well alongside their peers and are integrated fully into the life and work of the school, both socially and academically. At present, the targets within the individual education plans (IEP's) are too generic and do not inform sufficiently the teachers' planning and classroom practice, across the various

subjects. The co-ordinator for special needs has appropriately identified the need to collaborate with all of the subject teachers to revise the IEP's, and to monitor more systematically the progress of pupils on the special educational needs register. The classroom assistants provide effective support in the classroom which makes a meaningful contribution to the pupils' learning.

- The pupils benefit from the high priority the school gives to careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) and, in particular, to the promotion of STEM careers. The taught CEIAG programme focuses appropriately on key transition points, the educational needs of each pupil and their access to impartial advice and guidance. The pupils are prepared well to make informed career choices. By year 12, most of the pupils have gained a good understanding of the world of work and the career pathways open to them. The careers co-ordinator has identified appropriate areas for development. These include integrating better the discrete provision for CEIAG with the Learning for Life and Work programme and, evaluating the effectiveness of the contribution of individual subjects to the CEIAG provision.
- The pupils benefit from a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum across the key stages. The curriculum provision is strategically planned and evaluated rigorously each year to meet the pupils' changing needs, progress their learning and to provide them with the core skills and capabilities to meet the demands of the next phase of education, training or the world of work. Over the past three years, the school has been consistently meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and ensures that pupils have access to a wide range of academic and vocational subjects at appropriate levels of qualification.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- The school improvement process is informed to good effect by extensive consultation with all stakeholders and is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan (SDP)³. The key priorities identified in the school development plan focus appropriately on improving further the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and the standards that they attain. The SDP and associated action plans inform and guide well the school improvement agenda and are central to the work of the school.
- The senior leadership of the school is highly effective; there is a shared vision for school improvement and clear strategic direction for future developments. The senior leadership team (SLT) take a collegial approach to whole-school improvement, focused sharply on raising further the very good standards achieved by the pupils. The formation of school improvement teams, involving all staff, is having a significant and positive impact on the school's development and is supporting further whole-school improvement.
- While there are examples of effective leadership at middle management level within the school, the SLT have identified correctly the need to build further the capacity of middle managers, through well-targeted staff development, in order to develop a more consistent approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision within their areas of responsibility.

³ The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

- The governors carry out their roles conscientiously and supportively and understand well the challenges and opportunities facing the school. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. In order to develop further their knowledge of the curriculum changes, the governors need to be more systematic in their communication with the key post holders in the school.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils report that they feel safe in school and that their concerns are dealt with promptly. They are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Examination performance and other statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2011-12 to 2013-14

Based on data held by the school in SIMS⁴ and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving 5 or more GCSEs (A* to C and A* to E) and equivalent subjects, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category⁵.

<i>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</i>	2012	2013	2014
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100%	100%	100%
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	77.59%	96.61%	73.47%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁶</i>	<i>69.7%</i>	<i>71.3%</i>	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	53.45%	71.19%	59.18%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>45.4%</i>	<i>44.4%</i>	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	87.93%	100%	91.84%
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	50%	41.67%	25%

⁴ SIMS: School Information Management System

⁵ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Other examination results at key stage 4 from 2011-12 to 2013-14

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the tables below show the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving grades A* to C and A* to E in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCSE level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in these tables to facilitate comparison.

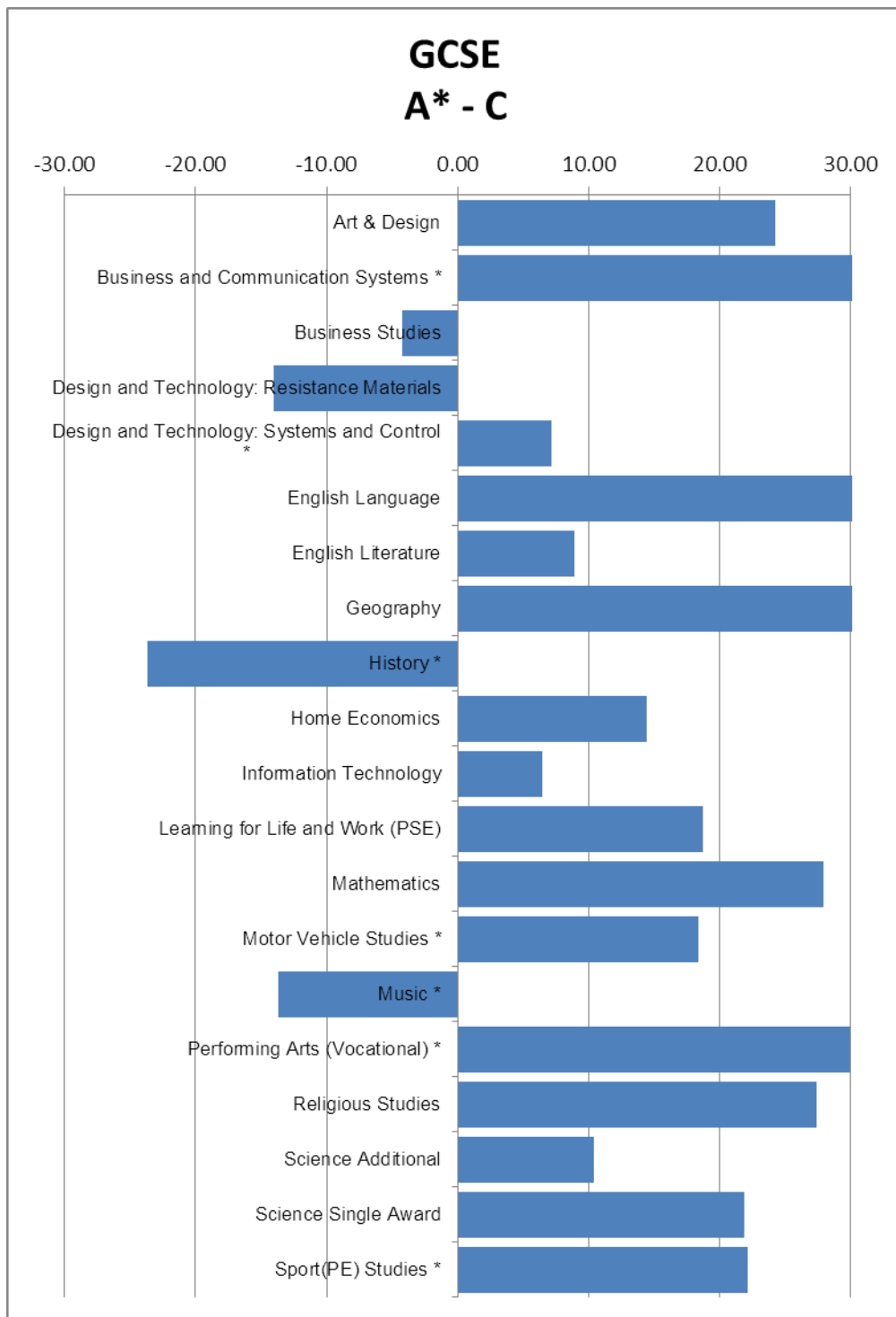
GCSE Subject	2012		2013		2014		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Occupational Studies	65.2%	93.4%	93.7%	100%	66.6%	100%	98

Level 2	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Childcare Double Award	100%	100%	100%	38
BTEC Performing Arts Double Award		100%	100%	*
BTEC Engineering Double Award	100%	100%	100%	18
BTEC Media Double Award	100%	100%	100%	11
BTEC Sport Double Award	100%	100%	100%	32
BTEC Countryside & Environment Double Award	100%	100%		13

*fewer than 5

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to C from 2011-12 to 2013-14

The bar chart below illustrates, based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the performance of each GCSE subject at grades A* to C, in all exam boards, compared with the three-year average for pupils in non-selective schools in Northern Ireland. A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above average. As the number of entries to each subject may vary considerably, comparisons should be treated with caution.



*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from this school who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for non-selective schools, as appropriate.

2012/13

	NI	School No	School %	Level 2 %	Level 3 %	Level 3+
Total Number of Leavers	13498	63	100.0			
Employment	8.6%	1	1.6			
Further Education	43.7%	61	96.8	28.5	69.8	
Higher Education	22%	0	0.0			
Training	18.4%	1	1.6			
Unemployed	3.9%	0	0.0			
Unknown	3.4%	0	0.0			

Accommodation

- The roof around the gymnasium and the English rooms is in need of repair and is impacting the health and safety of the pupils.
- The science laboratory facilities and storage area for physical education are inadequate resulting in limiting pupil experiences.

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