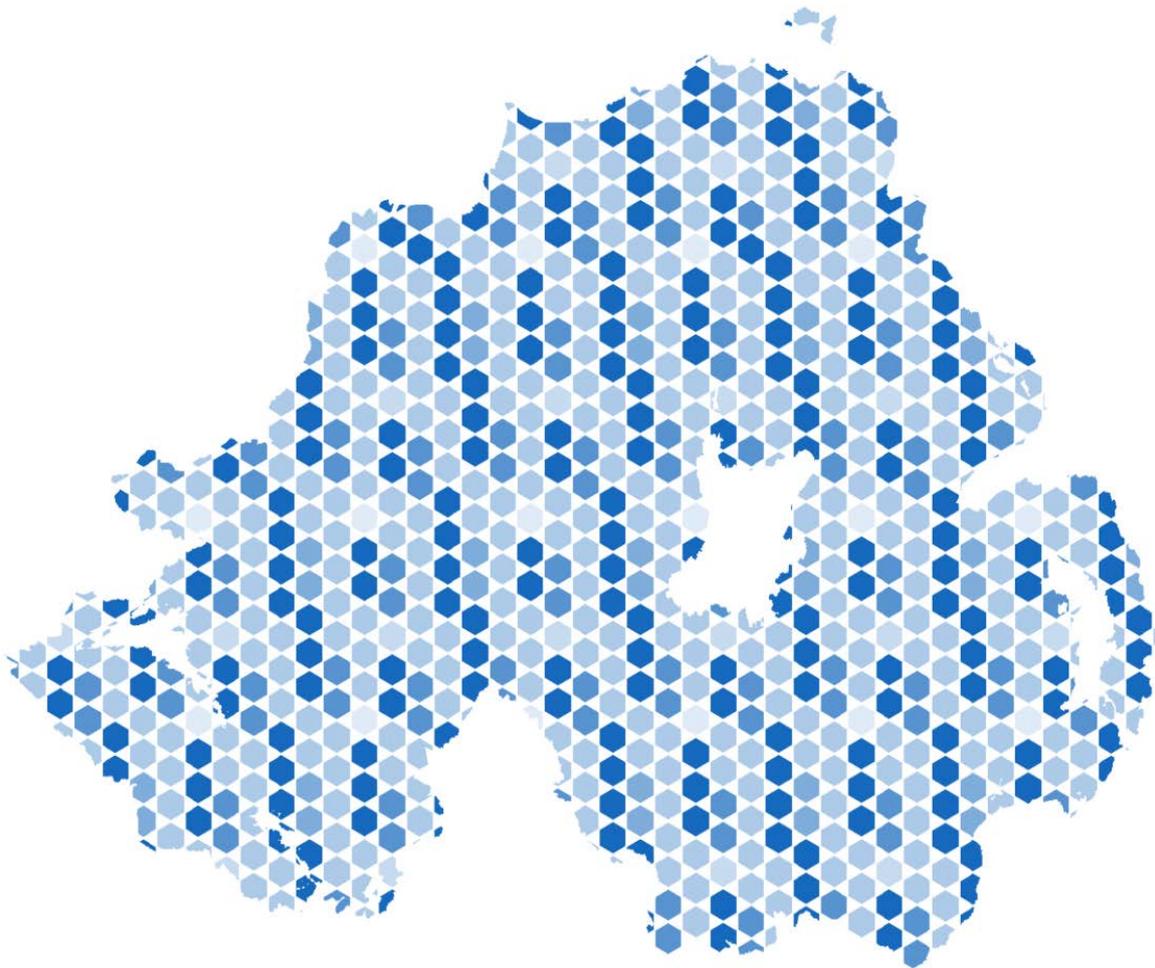


# SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Beechlawn School,  
Hillsborough, Co Down

Report of an Inspection in  
May 2014

## 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

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with children, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	153	115	70%	47
Teachers	23	19	82%	10
Support Staff	18	11	61%	6

\* fewer than 5

The ETI is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents/carers about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parent/carer questionnaires may be low.

Almost all of the parental questionnaire responses are positive. The parents value the progress made by their children and the kind and supportive ethos throughout the school. The small number of concerns were discussed with the Principal. The teacher and support staff questionnaire responses were very positive, and indicate strong support for the Principal and life of the school.

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

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the board of management.

## 2. Context

Beechlawn School provides education for pupils, aged eleven to seventeen years, with moderate and complex learning difficulties. The school is situated in the village of Hillsborough. The pupils come from a wide geographical area from Kilkeel to Twinbrook.

<b>Beechlawn School</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Enrolment	152	161	153	160
% Attendance	85.7%	85.1%	*	88%
Teachers	28.81	22.6	22.6	23
Classroom assistants	*	*	*	19
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	*	*	*	41%
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

**Source:** data as held by the school.

### 3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the pupils' achievements and standards;
- the quality of provision in the school; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

### 4. Overall finding

<b>Overall Performance Level</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Achievements and Standards</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Provision</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

### Key findings of the inspection

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are motivated and engage enthusiastically with the learning. They interact confidently and respectfully with each other during well-planned paired and group work. They enjoy working with a variety of resources, including Information and Communication Technology (ICT,) which support and enhance their learning.
- The pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and dispositions and are very well behaved. Their personal and social skills are developed very well, including communication skills, confidence and creativity. Relationships between the pupils and the staff are very positive and supportive.
- The pupils, particularly those on the autistic spectrum, benefit from the smooth transition arrangements in the school which help them settle to work and remain motivated to learn.

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

- The pupils are proud of their achievements and are keen to talk about and share their learning with others; their written work is well-organised and presentation is generally of a high standard. Their literacy skills develop very well within the carefully planned curricular and extra curricular activities.
- The pupils apply their learning in numeracy in real and meaningful contexts and as a result they understand how to use mathematics in their everyday lives. An excellent focus is placed on applying their learning to life and work and good outcomes are evident.
- The older pupils talk articulately about future career plans and understand pathways and the qualifications they need in order to progress to employment or further study. The pupils achieve well and develop progressively during their time in school and are well prepared for transition to appropriate post school placements including further education, training and employment, in line with their interests and aptitudes. The pupils gain a broad range of GCSE and other appropriate accreditation by the time they leave the school. Many pupils have achieved notable success in music, art and sporting activities in the local and wider community. The pupils are proud of, and celebrate the success of their peers.
- The pupils take on roles and responsibilities with maturity and confidence, including membership of the school council and as mentors to younger pupils. The year 13 pupils, for example develop a range of skills through managing the breakfast club.

## **6. Provision**

- The quality of the teaching observed was always good; it was very good or outstanding in 80% of the lessons observed, with 32% of the lessons evaluated as outstanding. The teachers and classroom assistants work collaboratively using a variety of strategies and resources to make lessons enjoyable, interesting and relevant. The pupils enjoy their lessons particularly when using local community facilities to ensure relevance to real life skills. The teachers know their pupils well, build progressively on previous learning and are adept at providing practical and meaningful activities that the pupils respond to with engagement and motivation
- There is a cohesive whole school approach to the arrangements for planning, teaching and assessment throughout the school. The individual education plans (IEP) are succinct and well targeted on the individual needs of pupils. Parents and pupils are involved well throughout the process and there are detailed and achievable success criteria. The provision is appropriately pupil centred, well differentiated with a wide range of strategies for learning.
- The pupils are provided with a very broad and balanced curriculum which has a strong emphasis on the arts, sport, home economics, science and technology and extra-curricular activities as a vehicle for connecting learning. The pupils benefit greatly from the particularly well planned integration of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. The overall approach to the curriculum strongly supports the development of the pupils' self esteem, confidence, resilience, employability and life skills.

- The high quality of recently developed resources and accommodation enhances pupil experiences, including the year 13 provision. Throughout the school pupils are enabled to take advantage of these resources, particularly in the practical subjects by the supportive and hard working assistants. Despite ongoing renovation, the school is maintained and cleaned to a high standard.
- The quality of the provision for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. A strong sense of teamwork and collegiality characterises the school and encourages an effective and productive climate for learning. There is a very caring, nurturing and inclusive ethos which permeates all aspects of the life and work of the school, in which everyone, adult and pupil, is valued. The staff are highly committed to the welfare of the pupils and to promoting high standards in work and in behaviour; the excellent contribution of the support staff enhances greatly the development of each pupil. The pupils spoke with pride about their school, about the interesting subjects they are taught and about the progress they make in their learning. Many enriching experiences are provided for the pupils, including for example, a popular breakfast club, a school-based Scout Troop and a wide and varied range of sporting activities. The pupils have very good opportunities to make decisions about their school and to contribute effectively to decision making through, for example, the school council.
- In key stage 4 and year 13 there are highly relevant programmes based on an appropriate balance of accreditation, work experience, vocational studies and personal development. The year 13 curriculum has been successfully developed to match the needs of pupils with more complex difficulties and in greater need of well paced, supportive teaching of appropriate accredited courses.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The principal provides outstanding leadership and in her four years of leading the school she has developed a clear strategic vision that has been shared, discussed and agreed with staff, governors and parents.
- There have been notable recent enhancements in provision including additional resources and the development of a year 13 programme along with, for example, new vocational facilities have made a significant contribution in support of school developments resulting in a collegiate and collaborative commitment to developing the school and meeting the challenges ahead. As a result morale is high and relationships are very good.
- The Principal and management team have developed a robust and effective process for school development planning. The current plan is well conceived and has engaged all stakeholders. It is soundly based on a strong vision for a happy and safe environment and focused on developing the pupils' skills and employability. Associated action plans are appropriate and monitored and evaluated rigorously. There is a high priority given to staff capacity building to meet the changing profile of the pupils and good attention is also given to staff welfare. The processes for the self evaluation of learning and teaching are well developed throughout the school.

- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated; the board of governors are very well informed about the life and work of the school. They provide excellent support for the principal, staff and parents and are effective in their challenge function.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

## **8. Conclusion**

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

**Accommodation**

- The temporary mobile classrooms used by the leavers are unsuitable and have a detrimental effect on teaching and learning. There are very limited facilities for staff meetings.

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