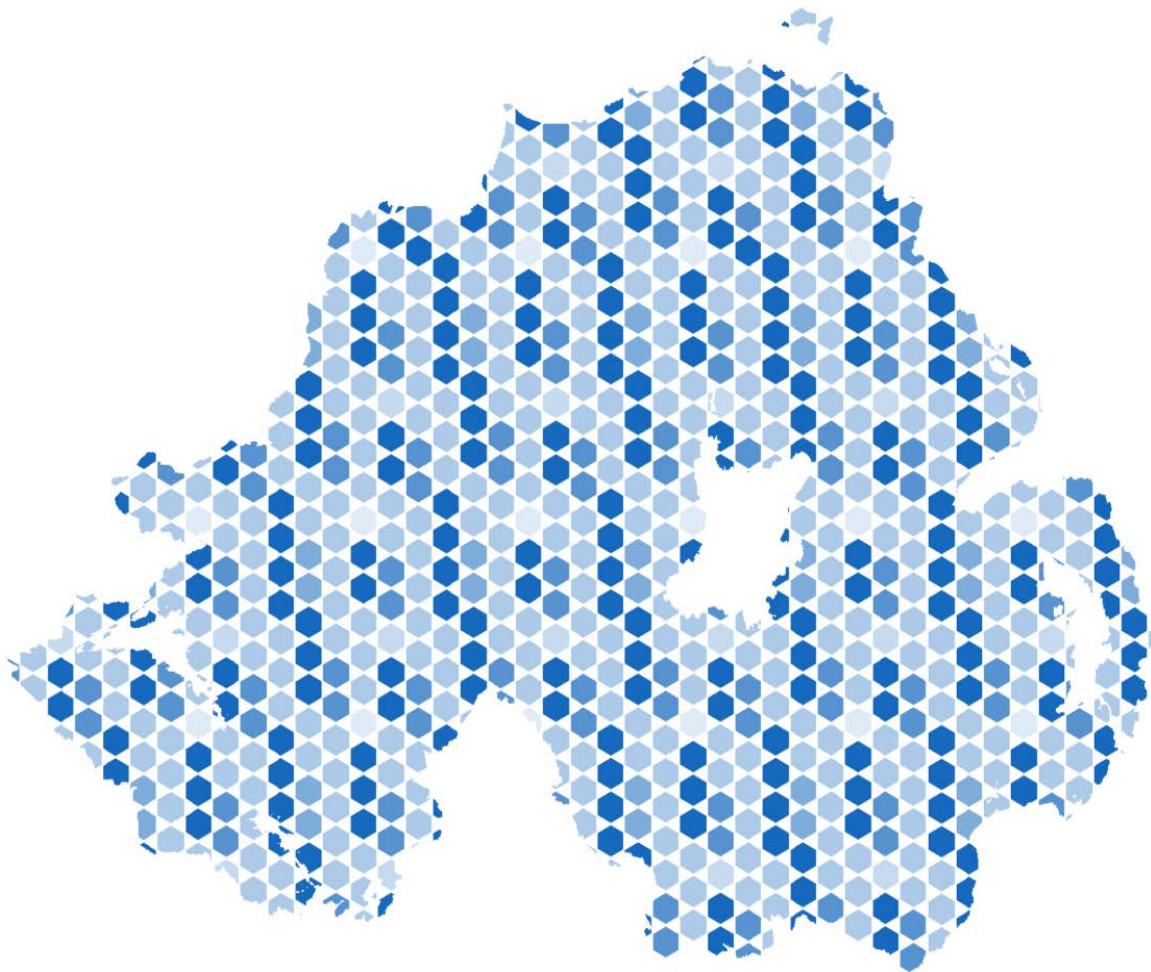


SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Hill Croft School,
Newtownabbey

Report of an Inspection in
June 2014

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

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 governors;
- meetings with groups of pupils; 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	122	10	8%	*
Teachers	19	14	64%	8
Support Staff	28	11	39%	*

* 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.

The parental questionnaire responses are very positive. The teacher and support staff questionnaire responses indicate strong support for the work 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>.

2. Context

Hill Croft School is a special school situated on a spacious site in Newtownabbey. All of the pupils have severe learning difficulties. The pupils come from two Education and Library Boards, the Belfast Education and Library Board and the North Eastern Education and Library Board. There is an increasing pupil enrolment in the school with currently 122 pupils aged from 3 to 19 years. The principal was appointed in 2011; there is one vice-principal, and 19 full time equivalent teachers, 4 of whom have management points and 28 classroom assistants. The school is in the process of planning for a four year extension programme with projected enrolment of 145 for September 2014.

Hill Croft School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	92	96	111	122
% Attendance	92.7%	91%	90.5%	91.5%
Teachers	14	16	18	19
Classroom assistants	25	27	27	28
FSME Percentage ¹	17%	20%	21%	36%
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	6

Source: data as held by the school.

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

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

Overall Performance Level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Very good

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are happy and well-motivated learners; they are proud of their achievements and happy to discuss their learning. They are friendly and, in most cases, have well-settled behaviour in school. The senior pupils work co-operatively with others in pairs and groups.
- The pupils throughout the school develop very good social skills and independent living skills as they participate in the wide range of well-planned activities throughout the local community and further afield.
- The pupils achieve good conversation skills and make steady progress in their reading and writing skills. The staff have appropriately begun to review and extend the reading schemes and resources in order to enable more sustained progress for a greater number of pupils in reading.
- The teachers provide a broad range of mathematical experiences across the key stages to advance the pupils' mathematical language, skills and understanding. Money problem solving in particular has been developed methodically throughout the school and as a result, the pupils are beginning to acquire this important life skill.
- The pupils attain good standards through ASDAN and Open College Network (OCN) accreditation in independence and life skills by the time they leave school. All of the pupils leaving the school go on to training, Further Education or adult day care placements.

6. Provision

- The quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory; almost two thirds was very good or outstanding. There is a need for the school to identify and to disseminate the very good or outstanding practice to all of the staff. The outstanding practice was characterised by well-planned and resourced lessons with high expectations of the pupils, appropriately differentiated work, good use of information and communication technology and a range of learning strategies to motivate and encourage independence. In the less effective practice there was a slow pace to the lessons, unclear intended learning outcomes and there was limited progression and consolidation of learning.
- The classroom assistants support the pupils well and in the best practice work in collaboration with the teacher to promote and support learning within classes.
- The whole-school planning structure provides a sound framework for continuity and progression of the pupils' learning. A systematic whole-school system for baseline assessments, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the provision has been recently introduced. The pupils' need to be involved further in target setting and the evaluation of their learning.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the pupils through skills based activities with a good focus on the holistic development of the pupils, however, they would benefit further from specialist teaching of practical subjects, for example, music, home economics and physical education. In addition, the younger pupils would benefit from further opportunities to learn through playing outdoors.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. There is an inclusive, caring and supportive ethos with very positive working relationships at all levels. The school works closely with parents and other agencies to ensure and promote the best education in order to develop the whole child. There is an openness to listen to pupils and parents and to respond appropriately, for example, through the recent consultation for the positive behaviour policy and the preventing bullying policy. Success is appropriately celebrated through assemblies, in-class and corridor displays and through the use of individual, class and whole school strategies to reward positive behaviour. The pupils are encouraged to develop new skills through the extended schools provision, for example, the choir, table tennis, athletics and art clubs. The provision for parents to meet with staff and pupils is well planned, through events such as bowling evenings, and there is an active parent teacher association which raises funds for the school.
- The school places a high priority on promoting healthy eating, which includes the provision of fruit for the pupils each morning. The pupils would benefit from further opportunities to engage in regular and planned outdoor activities, particularly play opportunities for younger pupils.

7. Leadership and management

- The school leadership has worked hard to complete thorough audits of the current provision throughout the school, gather parental views and place strong emphasis on building positive relationships with staff, parents and pupils. The leadership team has developed well with a strong sense of shared commitment to the enhancement of the school's provision for all of the pupils. The roles and responsibilities of the leadership team are now well established and the team provides good strategic leadership in both pastoral and curriculum provision. There is clear and consistent communication of the leadership team's aims and plans with the rest of the staff. The co-ordinators have begun to develop clear overviews of their areas of responsibility enabling coherent whole-school planning of teaching and learning to begin; there are appropriate plans to extend this to monitoring and evaluating the teaching and learning for their subject areas.
- There is a robust process for school development planning which addresses the strategic needs of the school through a well-conceived school development plan involving appropriately staff, parents and governors. The teachers and the leadership team use effectively self-evaluation processes to inform daily record keeping and strategic planning.
- The school has developed constructive links with other schools to enhance further the learning opportunities of the pupils. The school provides a regular fortnightly parents' group meeting in 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 well informed about the life and work of the school. They provide comprehensive support for the principal, staff and parents; to develop their roles further the governors need to exercise 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. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel happy and secure in school and they know whom to talk to if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. They spoke of their enjoyment of the range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational (and pastoral) provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

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