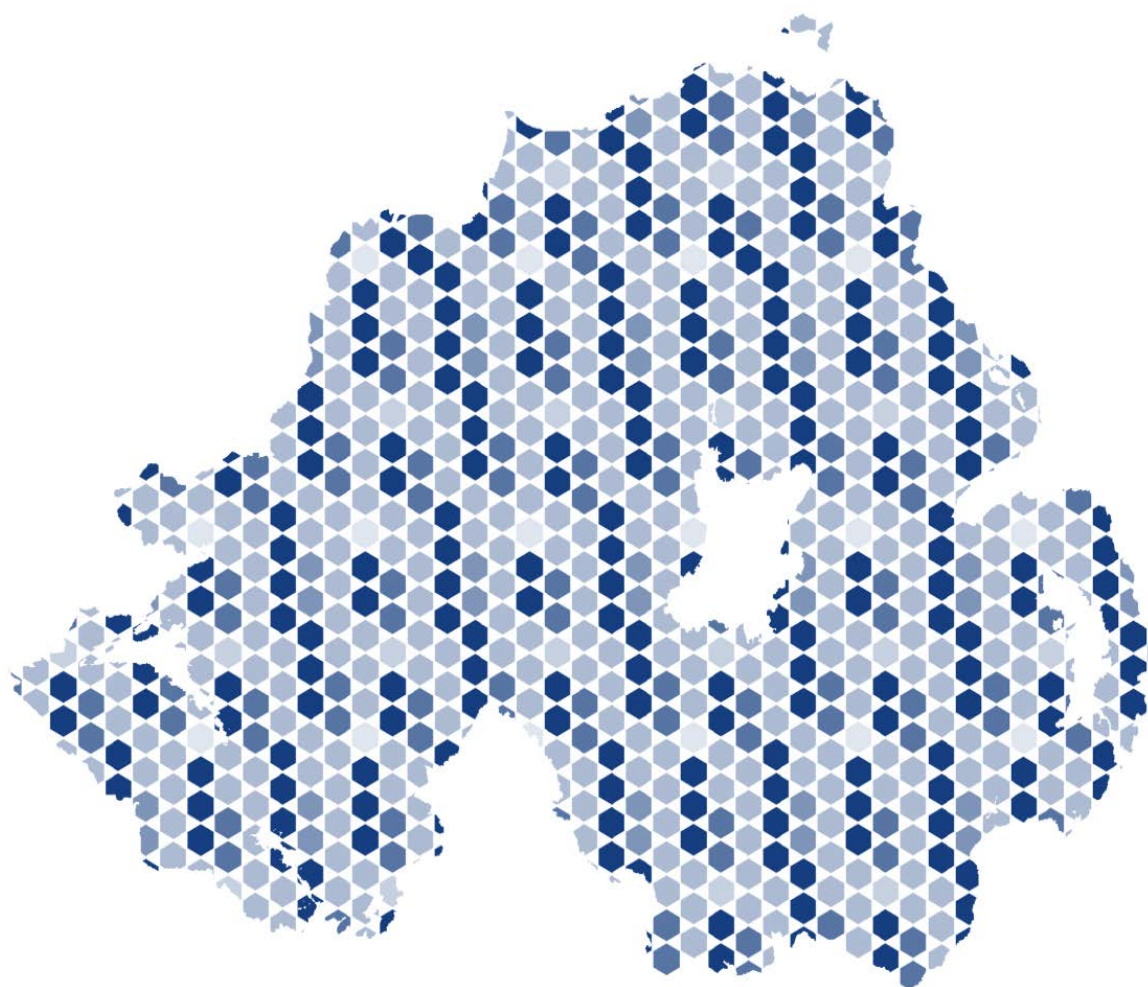


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Dominic's High School,  
Belfast

All-girls' voluntary grammar 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection (Involving  
Action Short of Strike) in  
October 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Context

St Dominic's High School is situated in West Belfast. The majority of pupils attending the school come from the local area, with the remainder travelling from locations in greater Belfast and the surrounding areas of Glengormley, Glenavy and Crumlin. Over one-quarter of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, a significantly higher proportion than is the average for the grammar school sector.

The school focuses on the development of character and integrity, striving to empower the pupils to reach their full potential. This is in line with its motto "Veritas" (truth), which embodies the ethos of the Dominican trustees and founders of the school. The school's aim, "to draw out our pupils' potential, to encourage them to identify their gifts and talents and to build on them in a spirit of truth", pervades all aspects of school life. The school has a strong musical, drama and literary tradition.

The school is an active member of the West Belfast Area Learning Community. It is involved in a shared education programme and a cultural exchange initiative which have enriched significantly the educational experiences for the pupils and staff involved.

Four of the teaching unions, which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that a significant minority of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The ETI have a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

St Dominic's High School, Belfast	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Year 8 Intake	142	142	146	141
Enrolment	1021	1031	1034	1012
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.9 (95.6)	95.0 (95.6)	95.4 (N/A)	(N/A)
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	26.7	28.7	28.6	27.1
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	4.8 (49)	4.9 (51)	5.4 (56)	4.8 (49)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need	14	13	16	14
No. of newcomers	*	*	0	*

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

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

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

## 2. Views of parents and staff

Four percent of parents (37) responded to the online questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated extremely high levels of support for, and satisfaction with, the work of the school. In particular, the parents commented positively on: the warm, caring ethos in the school; the dedicated staff who 'go the extra mile' to support the pupils; the high quality of education provided for the pupils; and their confidence in the dedicated, approachable and pro-active principal. The parents' written comments affirm the care provided for the pupils by the school, and the professionalism of staff.

Forty-six percent of the staff (39) responded to the online questionnaire. The staff responses were wholly positive about all aspects of school life. In particular, they highlighted: the welcoming, pastoral ethos in the school; the excellent working relationships; the strong sense of community and teamwork; and their enjoyment of working in the school. The ETI has reported the responses to the principal and the governors, and has discussed with them the small number of issues arising from the questionnaires.

## 3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of a post-primary inspection is 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.

As a result of the industrial action by a significant minority of the teachers, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the quality of the provision. Where it has been possible to evaluate aspects of the foci, they have been reported below.

## 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Unable to assure fully the quality of education
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Quality of provision	No performance level available
Leadership and management	Outstanding

### KEY FINDINGS

## 5. Outcomes for learners

- The pupils are articulate and confident; they display strong self-belief, have high expectations of themselves and are motivated to achieve their best. They have a positive disposition to learning, are respectful and interact maturely with one another, their teachers and all members of the school community. Their resourcefulness, sense of social justice and concern for others are evident through their active involvement in numerous community and international projects. As they progress through the school, they develop independence along with excellent skills in critical analysis and evaluation, problem-solving and self-management; they are very well-prepared for the next stage of their learning.

- The pupils participate and achieve very well in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities including sporting, cultural, literary and musical pursuits which enhance and enrich significantly their educational and social experiences.
- The outcomes attained by the pupils, including those in English, mathematics and science, are outstanding and are a significant strength of the work of the school.
- Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is consistently well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for selective schools in the same free school meals band.
- The outcomes attained by the pupils in almost all of the individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A\* to B are above the corresponding NI subject averages over the last three years. One-third of the subjects are more than ten percentage points above this average.
- The pupils who have free school meals entitlement attain in line with their peers. It is notable that, over the last three years, all of the pupils who have additional needs in aspects of their learning attained seven or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics.
- The percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A\* to C, over the last three years, has been consistently well above the NI average for similar schools. Almost all pupils attain three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A\* to C. Over the same period, at this level, all of the individual subjects performed consistently above or well above their corresponding subject averages.
- Over the last three years, a significant achievement is that pupils from the school are consistently among the top candidates in GCSE art and design, drama, Irish, Gaeilge and health and social care; and in GCE A level English, art and design, Irish and Spanish.
- The school's excellent performance in public examinations has been sustained over the last three years and represents significant value-added and progression in learning from the pupils' starting points on entry to the school. The evidence from this inspection shows that the success in public examinations can be attributed to: the excellent pastoral support provided for the pupils; the school's relentless focus on high quality learning and teaching; and on the support for steady progression in the pupils' learning across all the key stages. On top of the high levels of attainment in public examinations, the pupils also develop well the necessary skills and attributes to make a positive contribution to society and to the economy.
- Almost all of the year 12 pupils return to the school for post-16 study. In 2017, almost all of the pupils progressed to higher education courses, which is over 20 percentage points above the NI average for selective schools.

## 6. Quality of provision

- All of the lessons observed, from just over one-half of the teachers who co-operated with the inspection, were good or better in progressing the pupils' learning; approximately one-half of them were very good or outstanding. The pupils have access to consistently effective, appropriately challenging, well-planned lessons which promote excellent progression in their learning. There is a clear focus on the development of their capacity to study independently and to develop the skills necessary for the next stage of their learning. Through highly effective assessment practices, the school identifies and addresses underachievement in subjects across all key stages in a supportive, well-targeted and timely manner.
- In the provision for English, the clear, practical planning makes for well-structured lessons in which the learning is suitably challenging and based on age-appropriate texts which are matched well to the pupils' interests and abilities. In mathematics, the pupils are encouraged to take risks with their learning; skilful questioning is used to good effect to challenge and deepen their thinking and to develop their mathematical language. In science, the pupils engage in well planned practical activities to enrich their learning, foster skills in collaborative working, and extend their scientific enquiry-based learning.
- The enhancement of the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are a high priority within the school development plan and the associated staff development programme. The current focus on oral communication is a key feature in lessons across the curriculum and the pupils' oracy is being developed well through problem-solving tasks, investigations and effective group work. The welcoming ethos of the well managed library provides a nurturing, warm environment where the love of language and reading is fostered. In numeracy, the pupils benefit from regular opportunities to connect their learning through well researched and planned opportunities to use and apply numeracy skills across the curriculum in meaningful real-life contexts. Opportunities are provided for the pupils, beyond the classroom, to attend a variety of events and hear from motivational speakers who stimulate and engage them in their learning.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school's approach to the care and welfare of the pupils impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes. The effective transition from primary to post-primary school, the early identification of need and appropriate intervention strategies and impact are key strengths of the provision for the pupils who require additional support with their learning. The progress in learning of each pupil is tracked systematically to ensure they achieve to their potential. The class teachers are involved in the identification of subject-specific strategies to help these pupils meet the targets set in their individual education plans. The views of the pupils inform appropriately this planning process. Throughout the key stages, the academic and pastoral support provided for all of the pupils, coupled with the provision of appropriate curriculum and progression pathways, enables them to take risks in their learning, develop resilience and experience success.

- The pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum across the key stages, which is matched well to their needs and aspirations: this results in strong outcomes, high quality learning experiences and high levels of support for transitioning to the next stage of learning. The curriculum is planned carefully to promote well the STEM<sup>2</sup> subjects, aspects of ICT such as computer programming, and other influences that permeate from labour market intelligence. The school has sufficient capacity to provide the pupils with access to a broad and relevant curriculum internally. In addition, there is strong collegiality and effective sharing of resources with neighbouring post-primary schools. There is an excellent and comprehensive range of enrichment activities, which complement the taught curriculum and help pupils to develop further their inter-personal and leadership skills in real and relevant contexts, both locally and globally.
- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is highly effective. The planning for the taught programme has explicit progression which ensures the pupils are equipped with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to prepare themselves for accessing and entering higher education and the world of work. A significant programme of careers-related events and experiences complements the provision, including an in-house careers fair which brings the pupils directly into contact with some of Northern Ireland's leading employers in higher skilled sectors. The pupils who met with inspectors spoke enthusiastically about how much they valued the comprehensive range of careers-related opportunities the school provides, which enable them to make well-informed decisions at key transition points.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the overall effectiveness and impact of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in promoting learning across the whole school; and
- the overall quality of provision in English and literacy, mathematics and numeracy and science across the school.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The senior leadership team (SLT) provides outstanding, transformational strategic leadership. They are driven by a shared, visionary mission which ensures that the academic and pastoral needs of all of the pupils are met. The life chances of the pupils are significantly increased through the provision of a wealth of high quality educational experiences. The SLT leads change through effective consultation and the fostering of a shared understanding and a collective responsibility for school improvement. An embedded culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement is evident at all levels in the school. At the core of the school improvement work, is the holistic development of the pupils and their well-being, along with the recognition of the uniqueness, value and talents of each pupil and member of staff. The SLT motivates, and inspires confidence amongst, the teachers, support staff and the wider school community.

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<sup>2</sup> STEM refers to science, technology, engineering and mathematics

- The highly effective, comprehensive school development planning process identifies clear, appropriate priorities for school improvement. It is well informed through meaningful consultation with all stakeholders and the robust analysis of the rich quantitative and qualitative data available at each level in the school. Through a culture of ongoing support and professional challenge, the middle leaders are empowered to carry out their roles effectively. They work collegially to ensure consistently high quality learning experiences for all the pupils, to overcome barriers to the pupils' learning and to sustain the excellent outcomes achieved by them at all key stages.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The role of the governors in the creation and close monitoring of the outworking of the school development plan is exceptional; the quality of the self-evaluation of governance is sector-leading. The governors have an extensive range of complementary skills, are fully committed to the school and provide high quality support for the development of all staff. They provide appropriate challenge to the SLT. The governors are very proud of the progress made by the pupils, the high levels of commitment of the staff and, consequently, the excellent reputation of the school, for example, in relation to its musical, dramatic and literary pursuits.

## **8. Safeguarding**

- During the inspection, the school provided evidence that arrangements for safeguarding reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils reported that they feel safe and secure in school. They know what to do and who to talk to if they are concerned about their safety or well-being.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **9. Overall effectiveness**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, resulting from the co-operation of the majority of teachers, along with the senior leaders and governors, outcomes for learners are outstanding and leadership and management is outstanding. However, because a significant minority of the teachers did not engage in the inspection process, aspects of the quality of provision could not be evaluated wholly as outlined above.

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by teachers, the ETI is unable to assure fully parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the pupils. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.



## Examination performance and other statistical data

### GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2014-15 to 2016-17

Based on data held by the school in SIMS<sup>3</sup> and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in St Dominic's High School achieving seven or more GCSE examinations and equivalent at grades A\* to C and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band<sup>4</sup>.

The table also includes the percentage of year 12 pupils in St Dominic's High School achieving seven or more GCSE examinations and equivalent, including English and mathematics at grades A\* to B.

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following 10 permitted exclusions in the three year period</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE &amp; Equivalents in at least 7 subjects</i>	100	100	100
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</i>	99.3	98.5	98.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category<sup>5</sup></i>	94.1	90.0	N/A
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	98.6	98.5	98.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	91.0	87.5	N/A
<i>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades B or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	83.9	84.1	82.3
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	100	100	99.3
<i>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)</i>	100	100	97.8

<sup>3</sup> SIMS: School Information Management System

<sup>4</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

<sup>5</sup> The benchmarking bands for 2015/16, as set in in Circular 2017/8 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting' are different to those used in preceding years; therefore, trend comparisons with previous years' benchmarking data need to be treated with caution.

## GCE A level examination results at grades A\* to C from 2014-15 to 2016-17

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in St Dominic's High School achieving three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A\* to C, compared with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band.

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent - <i>*following 15 permitted exclusions in the three year period</i></b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	99.2	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	94.9	96.5	92.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	75.8	70.9	N/A

## Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level (over the past three years) Grades A\* to B

	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Number of pupils in Year 12 cohort	144	137	139

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Entries</b>	<b>School three-year average at A* to B %</b>	<b>Northern Ireland three-year average at A* to B %</b>
Art & Design	64	100.0	84
Biology	39	100.0	84
Business Studies	62	87.1	78
Chemistry	38	94.7	87
Design and Technology	46	89.1	88
Drama	102	100.0	85
English Language	422	98.6	89
English Literature	420	96.7	89
French	137	79.6	74
Geography	81	87.7	83
German	**	100.0	71
Health and Social Care	75	93.3	70
History	268	86.6	82
Information Technology	84	92.9	92
Irish	118	98.3	81
Mathematics	422	86.0	78
Mathematics Further	151	89.4	88
Media Studies	71	78.9	83
Music	48	95.9	90
Physics	39	97.4	88
Religious Studies	415	81.4	87
Science (Double Award)	331	84.6	79
Spanish	124	95.2	81
Sport / PE Studies*	*	96.3	82

\* indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

\*\* indicates fewer than 5 pupils

**Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level (over the past three years)  
Grades A\* to C**

	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Number of pupils in Year 14 cohort	117	143	131

<b>Subject</b>	<b>No of entries over three years</b>	<b>School three-year average at A* to C</b>	<b>Northern Ireland three-year average at A* to C</b>
Art & Design	27	100.0	93.1
Biology	54	96.4	83.9
Business (Vocational)*	*	100.0	88.7
Business Studies	46	100.0	89.5
Chemistry	27	100.0	85.9
Design and Technology*	*	100.0	92.9
Drama	74	100.0	90.6
English Literature	107	97.2	85.9
French*	*	95.0	88.3
Geography	22	100.0	89.1
Health & Social Care	31	100.0	86.3
History	64	100.0	88.6
Information Technology (Vocational)	72	100.0	88.1
Irish	51	100.0	95.1
Information Technology*	*	100.0	93.1
Mathematics	97	98.0	90.8
Media Film and TV Studies	40	97.6	89.3
Music*	*	93.8	84.6
Physics	41	97.6	87.8
Politics	113	96.6	89.2
Psychology	74	97.4	73.1
Religious Studies	57	98.2	90.1
Sociology	53	92.6	74.6
Spanish	27	96.4	93.0

\* indicates fewer than 20 entries over 3 years

\*\* indicates fewer than 5 pupils

### Other examination results: Post-16

Other level 3 courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

GCE Subject	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
OCR Sport Studies	100%	100%	100%	18(*,7,10)

### Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at St Dominic's High School, from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools from school census returns to the Department of Education for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Year 12 staying on to Year 13	86.3	98.6
% Year 13 staying on to Year 14	87.2	82.7

### Leavers' destinations

Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from St Dominic's High School who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for selective schools.

	NI	School	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	9750	148			
Employment	509 (5.2%)	0 (0%)			
Institute of Further Education	2083 (21.4%)	9 (6.1%)		9	
Institute of Higher Education	6706 (68.8%)	132 (89.2%)			132
Work-based Learning (Training)	221 (2.3%)	0 (0%)			
Unemployed	95 (1.0%)	3 (2.0%)			
Unknown	136 (1.4%)	4 (2.7%)			

### **Inspection methodology and evidence base**

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication, which is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ISEF-Post-Primary>.

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.

## Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

### 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 when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

### Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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