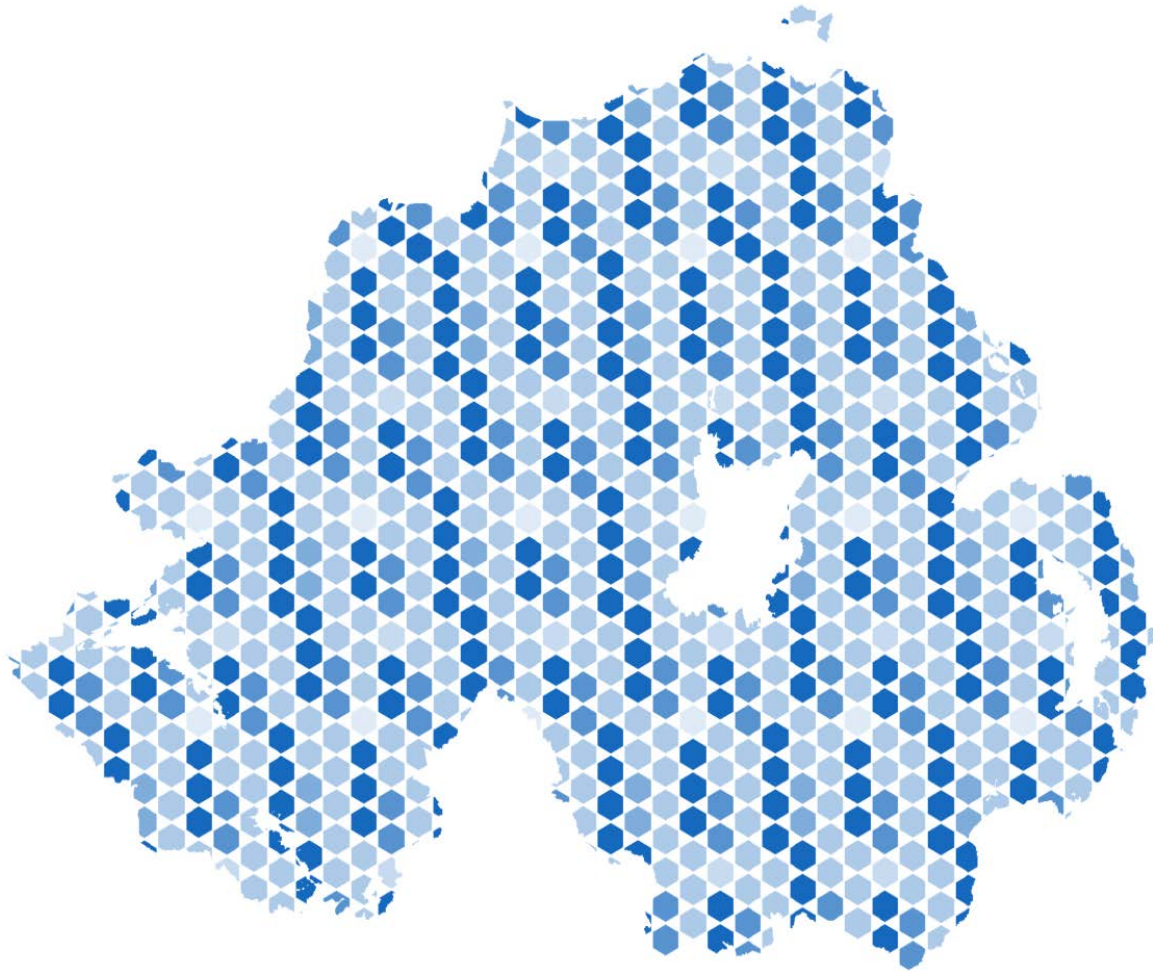


# SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Castle Tower School,  
Ballymena, County Antrim

Report of an Inspection (Involving  
Action Short of Strike) in  
April 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

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## 1. Context

Castle Tower School has 307 pupils aged from three to 19 years who experience a wide range of complex difficulties which impact on their learning, communication, behaviour and social development. The school moved in 2017 from two sites, emanating from a previous amalgamation of three special schools in 2007, to a new purpose built school building in Ballymena town centre. The principal is also acting principal of a similar school and leads and manages both schools; an acting principal assumes responsibility when the principal is working away from Castle Tower Special School. The school has an eco-flag award, and maintains close contact with the local community, for example the school has a 'Ready to Learn' programme with Ballymena Nursery, and there are strong links with the Youth Service and the Northern Regional College.

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 all 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.

## 2. Views of parents and staff

A small number of parents and none of the staff responded to the questionnaires. The parents who responded to the questionnaires were appreciative of the help provided for their children by the school staff. Any issues raised in the questionnaire were discussed with the governors and senior leadership.

## 3. Focus of the inspection

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the outcomes for pupils; in particular, how the school is addressing individual needs;
- the quality of provision in the school; and
- the quality of leadership and management

Where it is possible to evaluate aspects of the foci, they have been reported below.

## 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Unable to assure the quality of education
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	No performance level available
<b>Quality of provision</b>	No performance level available
<b>Leadership and management</b>	No performance level available

## Key findings

### 5. Outcomes for learners

- The school's data indicates that almost all of the school leavers over the previous two academic years have successfully transitioned to and maintain their placements in adult services, education, training or employment. It is appropriate that the school has identified the need to develop a more robust system for monitoring and tracking the progression of all pupils.
- The pupils have a good understanding of their learning pathways, and talk enthusiastically about transitioning to employment or to the next stage of their education. They spoke with confidence about the wide variety of activities they enjoy such as music, sports and going to the school youth club. The pupils enjoy opportunities to assume very purposeful roles of responsibility for example, as prefects, eco and school-council leaders and in supporting staff to manage whole-school daily routines such as transport and dinner times. They are proud of their new school and the range of additional opportunities now available to them.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- standards attained by the pupils;
- progression in the pupils' learning; and
- the pupils' wider skills and dispositions.

### 6. Quality of provision

- The teachers have reviewed the curriculum in order to meet the greater range of learning needs of the pupils. Specific groups of pupils, for example those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, are in classes which provide specialist educational and sensory environments and resources. The school leadership has placed an emphasis on the development of literacy throughout the school and has invested in a wide range of resources for grammar, spelling, comprehension and reading schemes.
- The teachers have undertaken training in a number of professional development programmes to support the particular needs of pupils, for example therapeutic and sensory experiences. The school has participated in extended training and support from the Middletown Centre for Autism and has developed an appropriately planned provision for pupils with autism. There is extensive preparation in school for pupils who avail of work placements and attend occupational studies courses one day each week at the Northern Regional College. There is regular support for pupils by the Department for Employment careers officer and Education Authority transitions officer. The school has a nurture room where experienced members of staff support pupils experiencing difficulties with their emotions and behaviour for short periods of time. The school hosts two youth clubs on two evening sessions for pupils from the school, and for past pupils and pupils from mainstream schools.

- The new and innovative school accommodation is planned and resourced to good effect to support learning with a wide range of sensory and bespoke specialist accommodation. The internal and external learning environments are organized to facilitate progression across and within the key stages. Therapists collaborate with teachers and provide therapy within classrooms, as well as in the specialist therapy facilities when appropriate. Teachers have revised the pupil individual education plans for learning and staff plan for learning in teams to address collaboratively the extensive range of pupils' needs.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the quality of the curriculum;
- the effectiveness of guidance and support in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences;
- the effectiveness and impact of planning, engagement, teaching and assessment in promoting successful learning; and
- the impact of the school's approach to care and welfare on the learning, teaching and outcomes.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- There have been recent appointments to the senior leadership team, including the acting part-time principal, an acting part-time vice-principal, and four senior leadership team members, one of which is a permanent appointment. Five teachers have additional management responsibilities. Given the newly established and extensive leadership team, it is important that the principal has time to consolidate, support and mentor their work. A management representative of the therapists working in the school attends senior leadership meetings in order to facilitate planning and provision for pupils' needs throughout the school.
- The leadership of the school has consulted with parents, staff, pupils and the board of governors to inform the current one year transition plan. The development of a clearly defined leadership structure with clear roles and responsibilities and a focus on meeting the needs of all the pupils are appropriate priorities. There is a need to develop further the processes at all levels to monitor and evaluate more strategically the impact of identified actions on the outcomes and provision for pupils.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. There are aspects of governance to review, namely for the governors to have further information of pupil progress in learning to inform their discussions.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the effectiveness and impact of the strategic leadership;
- the effectiveness and impact of the middle leadership; and
- the effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement, including self-evaluation.

## **8. Safeguarding**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflects broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. However there is a need for the school to review an aspect of the recording system of the intimate care policy. The pupils report that they feel safe in the school and that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. They report that they can discuss any concerns with staff with whom they have positive working relationships. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully, the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school.

## **9. Overall effectiveness**

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure 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.

## Statistical data

Castle Tower School	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Enrolment school	271	271	290	304
% Attendance	92.2	90.7	90	88.8
% FSME <sup>1</sup>	51.6	50.9	48.3	47
Newcomers	7	6	8	16

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

\* fewer than 5

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

### Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework which guides inspection and self-evaluation within special schools is available on the ETI website [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Special Education | Education Training Inspectorate](#)

Inspectors observed scrutinised documentation and held discussions with pupils, the principal and acting principal.

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.



**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 Outcomes for learners, on the Quality of provision and on Leadership and management:

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

**Inspection Outcome**

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when indicating what will happen after the inspection:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement which include the need to... There will be a formal follow-up inspection in...
The organisation 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 organisation's progress in addressing the need to... There will be a formal follow-up inspection in...

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