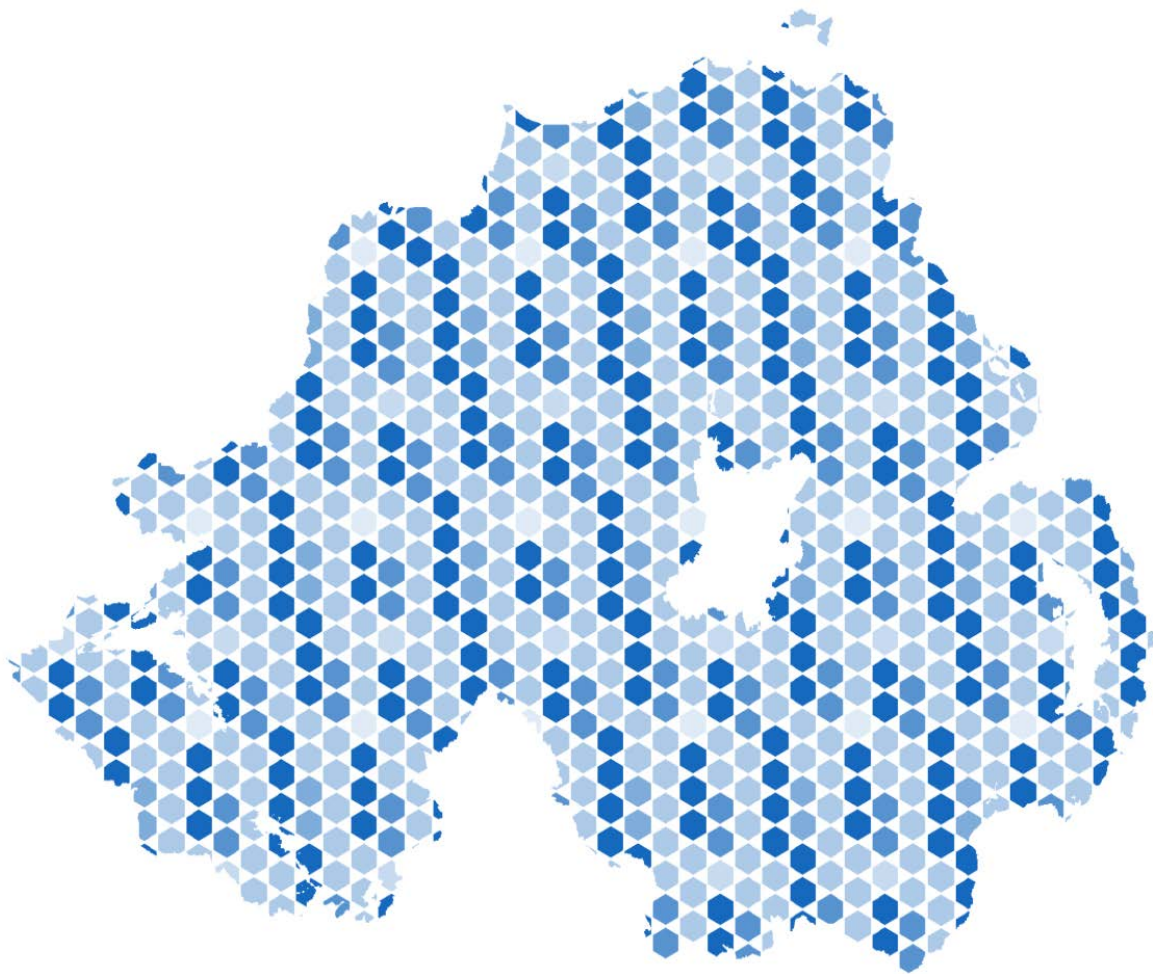


Education and Training Inspectorate

SPECIAL INSPECTION



Knockevin School, Downpatrick, County Down

Special, controlled, co-educational DE Ref No (431-6516)

Report of an Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike)
in May 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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1. Context

Knockevin School is situated on two sites; the main school for 107 pupils aged six to nineteen years is on the outskirts of Downpatrick, and an Early Years Centre opened in 2016 for 35 pupils of three to six years in Dundrum, ten miles away. The pupils have a wide range of severe and complex learning needs, communication, physical and medical difficulties. The pupil enrolment has increased by 45 since 2015. The principal was appointed in October 2018; the vice-principal's post is vacant. The school has many links with local schools, including a Shared Education play project with a local maintained primary school. Knockevin School takes an active part in the Area Learning Community and participates in student council activities with a local controlled post-primary school. The school has achieved a level two award for developing the pupils' awareness and understanding of rights.

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 none of the teachers would be co-operating with the inspectors. The principal, and deputy designated teachers for child protection co-operated with the inspection team in relation to their leadership and safeguarding responsibilities. The ETI has 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. Parents and staff questionnaire responses

Almost four percent of parents and 15 percent of the staff responded to the online, confidential questionnaire. The responses to the parental questionnaire were positive and the written comments indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school, including the regular parental workshops. The responses to the staff questionnaire endorsed the effective working relationships with parents and the supportive school learning environment. The ETI has communicated to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the main findings, and any individual issues arising, from the questionnaires.

3. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- 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.

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

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Overall effectiveness | Unable to assure the quality of education |
| Outcomes for learners | No performance level available |
| Quality of provision | No performance level available |
| Leadership and management | No performance level available |

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

- The school has identified appropriately the need to implement an effective system to monitor more robustly the progress and outcomes of all of the pupils.
- The pupils benefit from opportunities to achieve a range of qualifications from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment at entry level including home management, managing money, using shopping facilities, digital skills for life, performing arts and life-skills. However, the school reports that the staff plan to develop further the range of appropriate levels of qualifications for individual pupils to achieve their potential. The pupils attain grades accredited by Rock School London (RSL) in a range of individual instruments.
- During discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke confidently and with pride about the opportunities they have to take on leadership roles in the Eco- and school councils, where they have been involved in making decisions regarding the new school uniform. The pupils report that they enjoy their learning and in particular outdoor play, making friends, and the after-school clubs. They spoke with enthusiasm about their opportunities to participate in drama and musical events such as the spring concert, and to work with their peers in mainstream schools.
- Evidence provided by the Early Years Centre indicates that almost all pupils who commence their placements, have participated in intensive, individualised sensory programmes and consequently settle well to learning and play.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the learning outcomes for the pupils:
- progression in the pupils' learning; and
- the pupils' wider skills and dispositions.

6. Quality of provision

- The school provides a well-balanced curriculum with a wide range of learning activities for the pupils. The pupils experience enhanced learning opportunities for art, science, technology, drama and Irish through the schools in the Area Learning Community.
- The school has developed a nurture room for pupils who at times experience emotional and behavioural difficulties. The curriculum, and the enthusiasm of the pupils, exemplify the high value placed by the school on the performing arts, including music, drama, choirs and individual instrument tuition. Some of the senior pupils have joined the choir of a group of neighbouring post-primary schools.
- The individual education plans are concise with clear, informative teaching strategies and measurable targets. The pupil's annual reports are detailed and informative for parents. The transition plans are succinct with additional information from allied health professionals where appropriate.
- The timetables for the Early Years Centre outline well-balanced play-based learning programmes which cover all areas of the Early Years and Foundation Stage curriculum, and focus appropriately on sensory education. The allied health professionals with whom the inspectors met, report that there are highly effective working relationships with education staff, and that collaborative planning enhances the programmes and practice for addressing the complex needs of the pupils. Particular emphasis is placed on developing the skills of both the Centre staff and parents for beneficial therapeutic programmes, for example the sensory awareness training delivered by the occupational therapist. Parents report strong, highly positive working relationships with the staff in the Centre.

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/training and assessment in promoting successful learning; and
- care and welfare.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leadership team is in a period of transition with the principal newly appointed, resulting in a vacant vice-principal position. The roles and responsibilities for all staff are clearly defined to meet the developing needs of the school. The leadership team has identified the need to enhance their capacity to monitor and evaluate the impact of planned actions on school improvement and pupil progression; this work has begun with a review of the effectiveness of individual education plans.

- The school development plan (SDP) has appropriate priorities, however a small number of the associated action plans have too many targets. The leadership team have identified areas within the SDP requiring staff development, including the need to develop further the support for pupils with sensory needs, and to consult more widely with stakeholders to inform further the strategic priorities of the school.
- 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. The board of governors has been reconstituted and they have identified the need for governors to link with, and meet curriculum co-ordinators to inform them about their work, and the outcomes and progression of the pupils. The governors are committed to supporting the school and the local community, and are keen to ensure that the provision meets effectively the needs of all the pupils.
- A member of the senior leadership team leads the Early Years Centre under the appropriate direction of the principal. Clear procedures and protocols are in place to address all aspects of managing the centre, including safeguarding. An effective model of collaborative practice amongst teachers, classroom assistants, and allied health professionals has been developed in the Centre with excellent working relationships evident.
- The parent staff association has raised significant funds to finance projects which support the learning of the pupils. They have recently contributed to purchasing a mini-bus to provide further opportunities to enhance learning outside the school and grounds. Members of the association also attend school events, for example wellbeing and behaviour support workshops.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

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

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 some aspects of the intimate care policy and to ensure that a small number governors complete planned training. The pupils report that they feel safe in 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. The school is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice.

Health and safety/accommodation

The Downpatrick site of Knockevin School

1. There are insufficient classrooms, and outside space for play and physical activities.
2. The fire alarm system in the main school building and the five mobile classrooms is not linked.
3. The hoist in the hydro-therapy pool area is not functioning.
4. The doorway to the PMLD room is too narrow for large wheelchairs.
5. The emergency exits to the mobile classrooms have long, steep stairways.
6. The area outside the senior girls' classroom has a low retaining wall to ground level three metres below.

The Early Years Centre, Dundrum site of Knockevin School

7. The planters in the playground of the Early Years Centre have sharp corners and the low wall supporting the perimeter fence has sharp edges.
8. There is water ingress through the roof into the hall of the school.

Statistical data

| Knockevin School | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Enrolment school | 97 | 133 | 138 | 142 |
| % Attendance | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| % FSME ¹ | 26 | 26 | 32 | 33 |
| Newcomers | 6 | * | 15 | 15 |

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

¹ 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 scrutinised documentation and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with the principal and deputy designated teachers;
- 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.

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management²:

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

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on governance:

| |
|---------------------------|
| High degree of confidence |
| Confidence |
| Limited confidence |

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on safeguarding:

| |
|-------------------------------|
| Reflects the guidance |
| Reflects broadly the guidance |
| Unsatisfactory |

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

| |
|--|
| Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners. |
| Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners. |

² And the overall provision in a unit, as applicable.

Overall effectiveness

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

| |
|--|
| <p>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.</p> |
| <p>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.</p> |
| <p>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 in 12 to 18 months.</p> |
| <p>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 in 18 to 24 months.</p> |

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