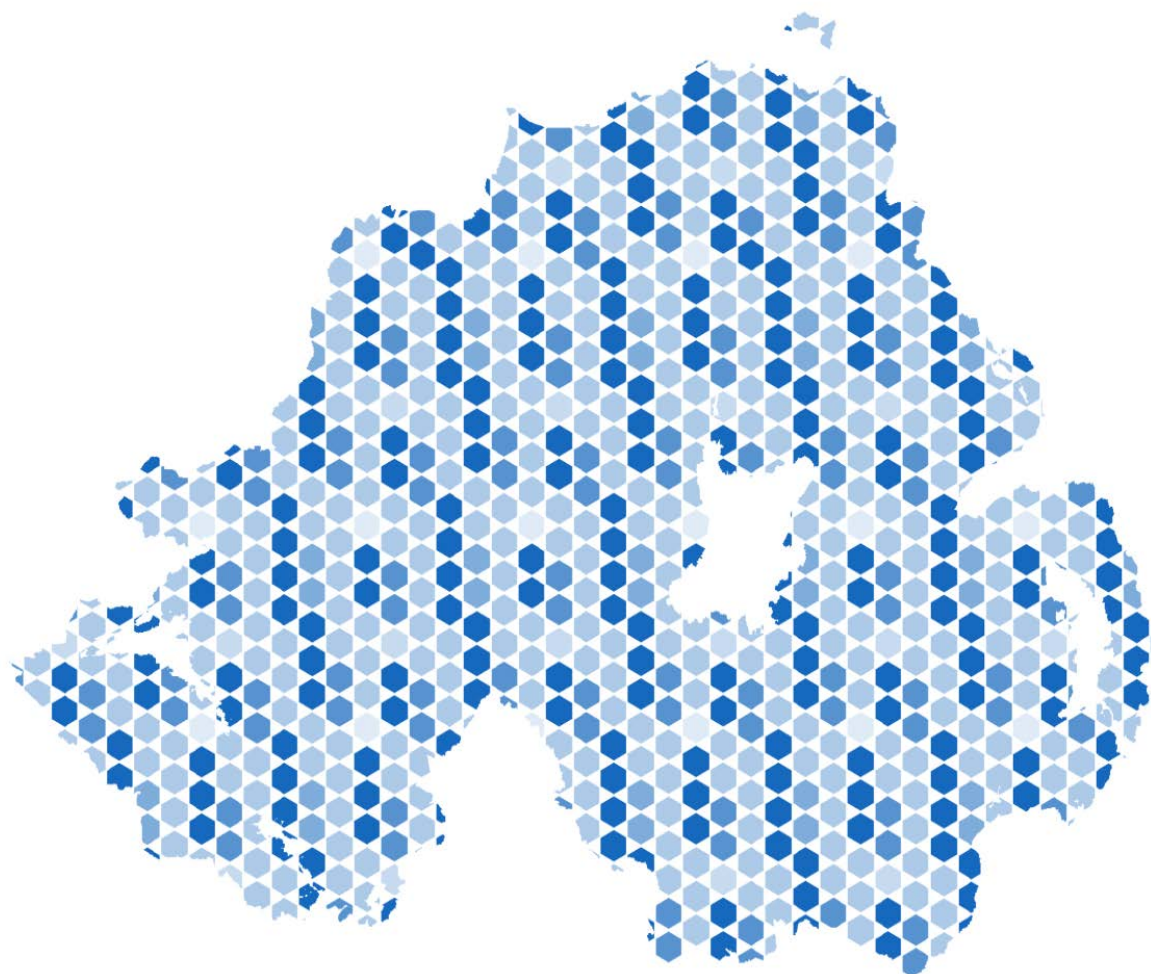


Education and Training Inspectorate

SPECIAL INSPECTION



Thornfield House School, Jordanstown, County Antrim

DE Ref No (331-6547)

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



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1. Context

Thornfield House School situated in Jordanstown, County Antrim, provides education for pupils aged 4-16 years, who have a Developmental Language Disorder. Enrolment over the last five years has remained steady at approximately 97 pupils and there are significantly more pupils in the primary department with only 20 in post-primary. Since the last inspection the school outreach service has transferred from the school to the Education Authority.

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 almost all of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The Principal, Vice-Principal and designated teacher for child protection co-operated with the inspection team in relation to their roles and 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

Six percent of parents and 81% of the staff responded to the online, confidential questionnaire. The responses to the parental questionnaire were positive and the additional written comments indicated high levels of satisfaction with the staff and the support for their children. The responses to the staff questionnaire emphasised their pastoral care towards the pupils and their collaborative working, to plan and monitor learning. The ETI has communicated to the principal and the chair of the board of governors the main findings, and issues arising from the staff 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;
- quality of provision in the school; and
- 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 pupils achieve accreditation in a limited number of subjects and review is required to ensure the curriculum offer for post-primary pupils is sufficiently broad and reflects their needs, interests and career aspirations.
- Twenty-five percent of pupils transition to mainstream or further education providers.

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

- There is a lack of effective curriculum links with other neighbouring schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and enable pupils to study subjects in other schools at Key Stage (KS) 4. In addition there are no opportunities for pupils in KS3 to meet and socialise with their peers in local schools to develop their communication, social skills, resilience and learning experiences.
- The school is appropriately reviewing the range and effectiveness of assessments used to ascertain the pupils' skills, abilities and progress.

The ETI was unable to evaluate:

- 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

- There have been two recent appointments to the senior management structure and it is important for the leadership to review their roles and responsibilities to recognise and use effectively the available expertise and experience.
- The consultation process with staff and parents lacks rigour and does not inform effectively the school development plan. While the school has developed greater consistency in the action planning process and a common format for the action plans has been established, the progress in achieving the key targets is not rigorously and consistently evaluated to inform the new three year school development plan.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. There are aspects of governance to review, namely to:
 - complete all relevant training for recruitment and vetting;
 - become better informed about the life and work of the school to include the outcomes and provision for the pupils; and
 - provide greater challenge and support to the leadership and staff with areas of responsibility.

The ETI was unable to evaluate:

- the effectiveness and impact of the strategic and middle leadership
- 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 are unsatisfactory¹. 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.

The areas which must be improved urgently include:

- to ensure all training requirements for the governors are up to date;
- ensure that the governors are provided with the necessary evidence to assure themselves that safeguarding/child protection is reviewed and recorded regularly, and reflects Department of Education requirements; and
- ensure that all temporary teachers are informed of the school safeguarding policy and procedures.

The ETI will return to the school within six working weeks to evaluate the progress in addressing the unsatisfactory arrangements for safeguarding.

9. Overall effectiveness

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the staff, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children.

The school is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

The ETI will return to the school within six weeks to evaluate and report on the arrangements for safeguarding.

APPENDIX A

Statistical data

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Enrolment school	96	97	97	102
Enrolment outreach	110	92	109	-
% Attendance	92%	93%	92%	95%
FSME Percentage	36%	43%	42%	48%
Newcomers	6	6	6	8

Source: data as held by the school.

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 the Principal, Vice Principal and designated teacher.

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.

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 management¹:

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.

¹ 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:

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 in 12 to 18 months.
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.

ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF THORNFIELD HOUSE SCHOOL IN FEBRUARY 2019

SAFEGUARDING

In line with the child protection/safeguarding procedures of the Education and Training Inspectorate, the ETI returned to Thornfield School on 22 March 2019 as a follow-up to the inspection which took place on the 11 February 2019; the purpose of the visit was to ensure that the safeguarding issues, evaluated as unsatisfactory in the inspection, had been addressed.

On the basis of the evidence available, the revised arrangements now reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE). The school needs to:

- review the child protection policy to reflect the latest DE guidance.

During the interim period, the school had received support from the Child Protection School Support Service of the Education Authority and the Advisory Service of the Education Authority.

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