

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Lurgan Junior High School, Lurgan,
County Armagh

Controlled co-educational, DE Ref No 521-0271

Report of a Follow-up Inspection (Involving Action Short
of Strike) in October 2022



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Department of Education
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Second follow-up to the inspection to Lurgan Junior High School, Lurgan, BT66 8SU (521-0271)

Introduction

The [original inspection](#) of Lurgan Junior High School was carried out in May 2016 when the school's education provision was evaluated as having important areas for improvement.

The first follow-up inspection which was impacted by industrial action short of strike took place in [November 2017](#). Owing to the action short of strike, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) was unable to evaluate the extent to which the important areas for improvement had been addressed, namely to:

- improve the quality of planning, teaching and assessment in order to promote more successful learning; and
- increase accountability at all levels, through establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities and monitoring and evaluating more systematically the quality of the provision and outcomes.

Consequently, Lurgan Junior High School remained in the follow-up process.

The ETI carried out a monitoring visit in October 2021.

The second follow-up inspection, carried out in October 2022, was also impacted by action short of strike (at the time of the follow-up inspection, some of the teachers were mandated by their union to participate in legitimate industrial action short of strike, which includes not engaging with ETI inspections). Three of the five teachers in senior leadership positions and representatives from the board of governors, co-operated with the follow-up inspection process. As a result, the school was unable to provide a complete inspection evidence base, including observations of teaching and learning, to demonstrate the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the original inspection report. The ETI has a [statutory duty](#) to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education being provided for children and young people. Therefore, the follow-up inspection proceeded on a partial basis and the key findings are based on the evidence made available at the time of the inspection visit.

Key actions and changes

In the interval since the original inspection, the school received external support provided by the Education Authority (EA) in relation to:

- action planning at senior and middle leadership levels;
- facilitating teacher professional learning; and
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of planning, learning and teaching.

The following are the key actions or changes which affect the work of the school.

- The school's development plan and action plans were adjusted appropriately in light of the inspection findings.
- A new principal was appointed in November 2019 and a new chair and vice-chair of the board of governors were appointed in September 2021.
- The number of teaching staff has increased from 45 to 53, of which a significant minority (41.5%) have been appointed subsequent to the original inspection.
- The permanent appointments of nine heads of department, five heads of year and co-ordinators of communication and numeracy, most (87.5%) of which were not in place during the original inspection.
- The school enrolment has increased from 618 in 2016 to 751 pupils currently.
- The number of newcomer pupils has increased from 45 to 79.
- The proportion of pupils with an entitlement to free school meals and those on the special educational needs register have decreased respectively from 23.5% to 16.4% and from 20.4% (126) to 15.2% (114).
- There has been increased participation by key staff in the Area Learning Community learning and teaching subgroup.

Views of parents/carers and staff

All of the parents/carers and staff were provided with the opportunity to complete an online questionnaire.

Fifteen percent of the parents (104) responded to the online questionnaire, with 36 of them providing additional written comments. Most (75%) of the parents who responded indicated that they are happy with their child's pastoral and learning experiences at the school. In the 36 written comments, two-thirds of the parents expressed concerns, including in relation to communication and the school's approaches to behaviour for learning.

Around 34% of the staff responded to the questionnaire and a small number provided written comments. Overall, their feedback was positive and reflected their satisfaction with, and support for, the life and work of the school.

Issues raised in the parent/carer and staff questionnaires were shared with the principal, vice-principals, and representatives from the board of governors.

Key findings

Inspectors were unable to evaluate the quality of the outcomes for learners, provision for learning, and the effectiveness of leadership and management. The following findings are based on the evidence available at the time of the follow-up inspection.

- In discussion with the inspectors, the pupils highlighted aspects of school life that they enjoy, including practical and extra-curricular activities. They shared their preferred learning strategies, explained how targets are set, and expressed mixed views about the rules and routines in school. Some of the pupils report that they would like more opportunities to be consulted on aspects of school life. Almost all of the pupils who met with the inspectors report that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- A pastoral team has been established, with a good representation of senior and middle leaders on the team who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the pastoral and learning needs of the pupils.
- There are improved lines of communication, accountability and support for staff as a result of the revised leadership structure, which is enabling them to lead to better effect in their areas of responsibility and to take forward whole-school improvement.
- Consistent and clearly understood behaviour for learning systems are in place which, the school report, are raising expectations and improving the standard of the pupils' behaviour routines.
- Teachers have ongoing, regular, and research-informed, professional learning opportunities, aligned with the priorities of the school development plan (SDP) and the post-inspection action plans. This includes staff training in pastoral systems, assessment content, the use of technology and the sharing of learning and teaching strategies. The effectiveness of the strategies is further reviewed and promoted in departmental meeting time. Inspectors were unable to evaluate, through observation of lessons, the extent of the impact of the school's sustained strategy to bring about measurable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- A whole-school approach to target-setting has been implemented with data tracking points and departmental interventions in place. Data is regularly monitored and shared with pupils and parents. Agenda items at departmental meetings have moved from operational matters to those about core business, such as effective learning and teaching and a focus on meeting the needs of the pupils. It is important that, at the next inspection visit, the school is able to demonstrate the efficacy of its use of first-hand evidence to evaluate and demonstrate the impact of these strategies on standards and learning.
- A transitional SDP is in place for the 2022-23 academic year which outlines appropriate priorities for school improvement.

- The board of governors are well informed and have a clear understanding of the monitoring processes used by the teaching staff in the school, which includes the use of pastoral and assessment data to set targets and track and evaluate the pupils' progress, resulting in the identification of, and support for, low and under-achieving pupils.

Conclusion

The school's second follow-up inspection is incomplete due to industrial action short of strike. The areas for improvement remain as the need to:

- improve the quality of planning, teaching and assessment in order to promote more successful learning; and
- increase accountability at all levels, through establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities and monitoring and evaluating more systematically the quality of the provision and outcomes.

The ETI has been unable to evaluate the school's progress in effecting the required improvements in the quality of its provision for a period of six years. The District Inspector will continue to monitor the school's progress, and the follow-up inspection will be completed at the request of the school up to and including April 2023. Subsequently, the inspection will be completed without further notice.

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