

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Dundonald High School, Belfast

Controlled, co-educational, non-selective 11-16, DE Ref No (421-0262)

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in May 2022



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Follow-up to the inspection of Dundonald High School, Belfast, BT16 1TH (421-0262)

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a second follow-up inspection of Dundonald High School in December 2018¹. Owing to action short of strike by the teaching unions, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the impact of actions taken and the extent to which the significant areas for improvement had been addressed, namely to:

- improve the quality of the planning, learning, teaching and assessment across the school;
- improve the provision in English, mathematics, the moderate learning difficulties (MLD) unit and for those pupils identified with additional educational needs;
- raise the standards attained for all the pupils, including in public examinations; and
- build the strategic capacity, at all levels, of the senior and middle leadership.

Consequently, there remained a need for Dundonald High School to address urgently the significant areas for improvement. The Department of Education made the decision that the school remained within the Formal Intervention Process under the Every School a Good School policy.

The school's development plan and action plans were adjusted appropriately in light of the inspection findings.

ETI carried out a monitoring visit in June 2021 and a third follow-up inspection in May 2022.

In the interval since the initial inspection, the school has received external support provided by the Education Authority (EA) in relation to: strategic leadership and management; governance; planning, learning, teaching and assessment; the English and mathematics departments, and the unit for pupils with MLD; and pastoral care and positive behaviour management. The extent of the external support included: building the strategic capacity, at all levels, of senior and middle leadership; enabling governors to be better informed about the provision for planning, teaching, learning and assessment so that they can affirm actions taken or exercise appropriately their challenge function; and ensuring that quantitative data, as well as qualitative and pastoral information, is used holistically to set realistic targets in line with pupil potential and capability.

¹ [Follow-up Inspection \(Involving Action Short of Strike\) – Dundonald High School, Belfast \(421-0262\)](#)

Over the same period, the key actions or changes which affect the work of the school include:

- The overall school enrolment has increased from 339 in 2017 to 593 pupils currently. Over the same period, the number of newcomer children has increased significantly from 11 to 46 and the proportion of pupils with a statement of educational need has decreased from 17.1% to 12.5%.
- The senior and middle leadership teams have been restructured and the board of governors has been reconstituted. The principal has returned to post after a prolonged period of ill health, and the vice-principal and four senior leaders have been appointed on a permanent basis.
- The number of teaching staff has increased from 30 full-time equivalent (FTE) to 47.7 FTE, and the number of support staff has risen from 28 to 32.
- Accommodation for technology and design, home economics, art and design, information and communication technology, history, science and the MLD unit has been upgraded.

As a consequence of the external support and the key changes and actions taken within the school, there have been improvements in the quality of education as reported in the key findings below.

Key findings

Seventeen percent of parents (98) responded to the online questionnaire², with forty-six (50% of respondents) providing additional written comments. A majority of the parents are happy with their child's pastoral and learning experiences at the school. Thirty-three percent of the staff responded to the questionnaire; overall, their feedback was positive and highlighted the school's inclusive ethos and the commitment of the staff to the pupils' well-being. Any issues raised in the parent and staff questionnaires were discussed with the senior leaders and governors.

The outcomes for learners have improved and the remaining important areas for improvement identified are being addressed.

There is an increasing sharper focus on using baseline data to track progress and this information is shared in a meaningful manner with the pupils. The school is collating and using a range of internal data, including pastoral information and commercial standardised assessments, to track pupil progress across the curriculum and inform the departments' planning. However, the school needs to use a wider range of first-hand evidence to identify pupils requiring support with their learning, then monitor and evaluate the impact of subsequent interventions in order to inform ongoing improvement in classroom practice and, the next stages of target-setting.

² As part of the second follow-up inspection, there was an opportunity for parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils all reported that they feel safe in school: they know what to do and who to go to if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. They appreciate the helpful, welcoming teachers who make their learning enjoyable. In their oral responses, a majority of these pupils expressed their views clearly and with confidence: they would value increased opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of their own learning experiences. When given the opportunity, in a majority of lessons, the pupils were motivated, engaged actively and worked well in pairs or small groups.

The quality of provision has improved and the remaining important areas for improvement identified are being addressed.

Staff have focused on developing a consistent approach to lesson planning and have received associated training in this area; as a result, the quality of the learning and teaching meets more effectively the needs of most of the pupils. Most of the lessons observed were effective in promoting and reinforcing successful learning. In the best practice, the pupils were well settled, attentive and ready to learn. Lessons had a clear structure and, where appropriate, practical tasks were incorporated to progress or consolidate the learning. The pupils worked well with their teachers and peers and engaged actively in the lessons through question-and-answer sessions, group tasks and independent work. Going forward there is a need to address an over-reliance on worksheets, a tolerance of low-level disruption and low expectations of what the pupils can achieve.

There is insufficient planning between the MLD unit and mainstream departments to meet fully the learning needs of the significant proportion of pupils with additional needs (45%) and provide them more consistently with differentiated learning experiences across the curriculum. The teacher's commentary on, and marking of, the pupils' work is an important area for improvement.

The quality of provision for English has progressed, but the standards attained by the pupils is still an important area for improvement. There have been important developments in learning and teaching: most of the lessons observed were effective, clearly structured and supported by appropriate multimedia (information and communication technology) and other resources.

While there is improvement in the quality of planning for learning, the provision for mathematics remains an important area for improvement. A majority of the lessons observed were effective; however, going forward there is a need for greater consistency in the quality of the pupils' learning experiences.

The provision in the MLD unit requires significant improvement. Although a variety of baseline assessments are used at key stage (KS) 3 to support more effectively the planning and teaching, including the use of electronic tablets and a sensory room to enhance learner engagement, more needs to be done. To effect further improvement it will be important to formalise collaboration between the mainstream and MLD staff in order to make differentiation and progression more consistent across the subjects. The temporary staffing of the MLD unit remains a concern and requires better strategic planning, alongside ongoing monitoring and review.

Curriculum planning has improved and all pupils now have access to a wider range of subjects that meet more effectively their needs, interests and abilities. The KS 4 curriculum offer has increased from 26 subjects to 38 subjects with 33 subjects currently being delivered. The school needs to keep under review the pupils' changing needs and aspirations when planning the curriculum, in order to ensure that all continue to have access to a suitably broad and balanced range of subjects at KS 4. The school also needs to align better curriculum and careers provision to ensure that there is appropriate progression to the next stage of education or employment and track more closely the required levels of entry to courses in further education and work-based learning.

A positive behaviour system, coupled with restorative approaches, has been implemented, the behaviour for learning policy has been reviewed and the effectiveness of these developments is being monitored. Pastoral data indicates an overall reduction in pupil incidents, and the staff report improving working relationships and behaviours across the year groups. However, this is at an early stage of development and further training is planned to support the consistent implementation of the new policy and processes. Pupil attendance remains a significant area of concern and requires a rigorous, consistent whole-school approach. The senior leaders have adopted a range of measures including, notably, the appointment of an attendance officer to follow-up attendance issues promptly and liaise between school, parents and pupils.

The quality and effectiveness of leadership and management have improved and leadership teams, at all levels, are addressing the remaining important areas for improvement.

An appropriate re-structuring of the senior leadership team (SLT) has allowed for greater distribution of roles and responsibilities, based on clear job descriptions. There has also been a significant number of new appointments at middle leadership level. Lines of accountability between SLT and middle leaders are clearly understood and are being implemented to good effect, leading to a more consistent approach to planning, teaching, learning and assessment. There has been significant professional development at all levels of leadership throughout the school and a number of staff have completed the EA leadership and development programme and associated school improvement projects. The processes for self-evaluation and subsequent action-planning by senior and middle leadership are not applied consistently across subjects and areas of responsibility. It will be important, going forward, that the school establishes more robust quality assurance processes. These will include a wider range of first-hand evidence, notably observations of the learning and monitoring of the quality of work and marking in the pupil's books, to ensure that the teachers' expectations and the standards attained across the school are consistently high.

Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors have a good range of complementary skills and carry out their roles conscientiously; they are actively involved in the life and the work of the school. The board of governors' subcommittee for achievement and standards receives an annual data analysis report and they meet with individual subject heads of department to support their improvement work, and review and quality assure the progress being made against agreed targets.

Overall effectiveness

Dundonald High School needs to continue to address remaining important areas for improvement. The follow-up inspection has identified the need to:

- continue to raise standards in the wider outcomes and achievements for all pupils;
- refine the self-evaluation processes and improvement planning at all levels in order to sustain and build on the progress to date;
- address the remaining temporary leadership and management positions; and
- continue to improve the provision in English, mathematics and the MLD unit.

The ETI will conduct a further follow-up inspection in 12 to 18 months.

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