

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

The High School, Ballynahinch, County Down

Controlled, co-educational, non-selective, 11-16 school,
DE Ref No. 421-0029

Report of a Follow-up Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike)
in March 2023



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Follow-up inspection visit to The High School, Ballynahinch, County Down (421-0029)

The [original inspection](#) of The High School, Ballynahinch was carried out in December 2012 when the quality of education provided by the school was evaluated as satisfactory and areas for improvement were identified.

Two follow-up inspections took place in [September 2014](#) and [September 2016](#) and a third follow-up inspection, which was impacted by industrial action short of strike, took place in [March 2018](#). The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Monitoring Visit in October 2021.

Inspectors were unable to evaluate the extent to which the important areas for improvement left at the last inspection had been addressed, namely to:

- raise further the standards attained by the pupils and continue to address the inconsistency in outcomes across the individual subjects;
- improve the quality of provision in English and mathematics and implement more consistently across the curriculum, strategies to develop further and more systematically the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills; and
- strengthen the role of the senior leaders and governors in monitoring and evaluating rigorously the impact of the planned actions on the pupils' learning and on the standards they attain.

Consequently, The High School, Ballynahinch remained in the follow-up process.

A fourth follow-up inspection was carried out in March 2023 which was also impacted by action short of strike. (At the time of the follow-up inspection, members of the five main teaching unions in Northern Ireland were mandated by their unions to participate in legitimate industrial action short of strike, which includes not engaging with ETI inspections.)

Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that the school would co-operate with the inspection team in relation to elements of the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

The ETI has a [statutory duty](#) to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education being provided for children and young people. The follow-up inspection proceeded on a partial basis as outlined above and the key findings are based on evidence made available at the time of the inspection visit. Inspectors were unable to evaluate the progress against the areas for improvement, and teachers did not facilitate observation of lessons by the inspectors.

Key actions and changes

In the interim period since the previous follow-up inspection in March 2018, the school has received external support provided by the Education Authority (EA) in relation to learning and teaching, improving pupil attendance, and aspects of leadership, including governance.

Views of pupils, parents/carers and staff

As part of this follow-up inspection, there was an opportunity for parents and carers to complete a confidential questionnaire. Around 15% of parents (50) responded to the online questionnaire, with 22 providing additional written comments. The responses were highly positive and reflected parental appreciation of the strong pastoral commitment of school staff to meeting the needs of the pupils. The additional comments, and matters raised in the questionnaire responses were discussed with the principal and a representative of the governors.

The online questionnaires were not distributed to the pupils and staff. Therefore, it is not possible to report on the views of all the pupils and staff. The ETI intends to re-issue the questionnaires at the time of the next inspection visit to complete this follow-up inspection.

Key findings in relation to Safeguarding

The following findings are based on the evidence available at the time of the follow-up inspection.

- In discussions with the inspectors, pupils from across the year groups spoke highly of the pastoral and academic support they receive from the staff. The pupils report that they feel encouraged, safe and well cared for, and they talked positively about the learning opportunities provided, including competitive sports, educational trips and bespoke careers advice. The key stage 4 pupils were especially appreciative of the timetabling changes made by the school to facilitate their individual subject choices.
- The school did not provide sufficient evidence for ETI to evaluate the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

Conclusion

The school's fourth follow-up inspection is incomplete. The areas for improvement remain as the need to:

- raise further the standards attained by the pupils and continue to address the inconsistency in outcomes across the individual subjects;
- improve the quality of provision in English and mathematics and implement more consistently across the curriculum, strategies to develop further and more systematically the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills; and
- strengthen the role of the senior leaders and governors in monitoring and evaluating rigorously the impact of the planned actions on the pupils' learning and on the standards they attain.

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 seven years since the third follow-up inspection.

As the school did not provide sufficient evidence to evaluate the arrangements for safeguarding pupils, the Department of Education will write to the Education Authority and the Board of Governors to seek assurance on the efficacy of the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

The District Inspector will continue to monitor the school's progress, and the follow-up inspection may be completed at the request of the school up to and including June 2023. Subsequently, the inspection will be completed without further notice.

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