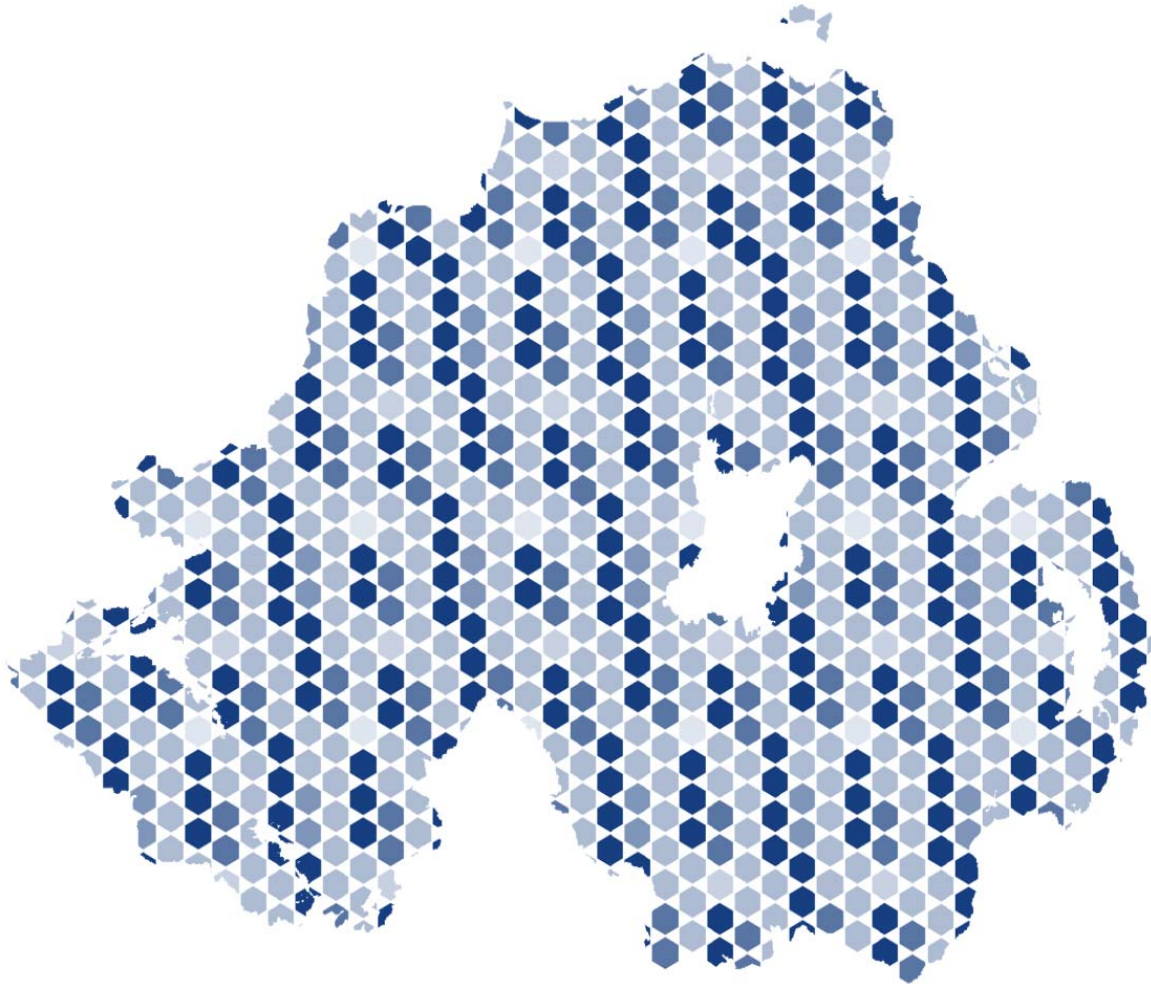


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballee Community High School,
Ballymena

Report of an Inspection
in January 2010

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Ballee Community High School is a co-educational controlled secondary school situated on the southern outskirts of the town of Ballymena, County Antrim. The enrolment has declined over the past five years from 375 in 2005/06 to 300 in 2009/10. During this period, over 90% of the pupils entering year 8 either obtained a Grade D or did not participate in the Transfer Procedure. Approximately one-third of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, and the school has identified almost 39% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning.

1.2 THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS AND PUPILS

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8 and 12.

One hundred and three questionnaires were issued to parents; only 14 were returned to Inspection Services Branch and of these eight contained additional written comments. The responses from the small number of questionnaires returned indicate support for the life and work of the school, with parents commenting favourably on the quality of the care and support for their children.

Approximately two-thirds of the teachers and two support staff completed confidential questionnaires, with two teachers providing additional written comments. Most of these responses were wholly positive indicating strong support for the work of the school.

The governors expressed firm support for the work of the school and the leadership of the Principal. In particular, they commented on the improved levels of behaviour of the pupils and their own increased awareness of the need to raise achievement. Discussions were also held with representatives of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB), at the request of the school, about the recent actions taken and the support provided to the school by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) of the NEELB.

In the discussions held with the pupils in years 8 and 12, the pupils talked enthusiastically about the encouragement they receive from the teachers, the value of year 11 work experience placements, and the good range of after-school activities. The pupils are fully aware of what to do and who to talk to if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the very few other matters emerging from the parents', teachers' and support staff questionnaires.

1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on learning and teaching, and leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English, mathematics and science. The school's provision for careers, pastoral care, arrangements for child protection,

and the quality of education for pupils with special educational needs was also evaluated as well as the school's general approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, inspectors observed classes in a range of other subjects.

A summary of the main findings for the specialist subject areas under focus is set out in Appendix 1.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

When given the opportunity, the pupils are motivated and engage well in their learning, and particularly so in practical subjects. In general, however, the pupils' social skills, their ability to communicate, and their self-esteem and confidence need to improve.

The levels of attainment in public examinations are unsatisfactory. In 2009, just over two-thirds of the pupils in year 12 were entered for five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level with only one-tenth achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C. These standards are considerably below the average for similar non-selective schools in Northern Ireland (NI). Over the past three years, although the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more subjects at GCSE at A*-C including English and mathematics has risen slightly, this percentage remains significantly below the NI average for similar schools. Furthermore, while the percentage of pupils attaining at least five GCSEs at grades A*-E has shown improvement over the same period, this proportion remains well below that for similar schools. The standards achieved at A*-C and A*-E in approximately three-quarters of the GCSE subjects over the past three years are more than ten percentage points below the corresponding three-year NI averages.

The school has identified the need to improve achievement in public examinations; the inspection findings confirm that raising standards is an issue which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The school offers a range of general and applied qualifications at key stage (KS) 4 with additional options provided by the school's collaborative arrangements through the Ballymena Learning Together partnership. However, the curriculum currently on offer does not meet the needs of all of the pupils. For example, a high proportion of pupils are currently not entered for GCSE nor do they have access to appropriate public examinations in order to ensure suitable opportunities to support progression to further education, training or employment.

More details of the examination results can be found in Appendix 4.

2.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of teaching observed ranged from very good to inadequate: a few of the lessons were very good; just under one-third were good; over half were satisfactory; and a small number were inadequate.

In the more effective practice observed, the pupils were attentive, engaged in their learning, and gained in confidence as the lesson progressed. In these lessons, there was appropriate pace and level of challenge, good use of a variety of effective teaching strategies, and good classroom management, particularly when the behaviour of a minority of the pupils was

potentially disruptive. The less effective practice was characterised by: an over-emphasis on transcription and the completion of low level tasks; insufficient differentiation; and limited opportunities for the pupils to engage actively in their learning. In these lessons, the standards were too low and the pupils were passive, often becoming distracted from their learning and, on occasions, unsettled and engaged in low level disruptive behaviour.

In order to improve the quality of learning and teaching the teachers need to raise their expectations of what the pupils can achieve, and match more closely the learning and teaching strategies to the abilities and interests of all of the pupils, including those with special educational needs.

2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The pastoral work of the school is given high priority and the provision for pastoral care is good. This is demonstrated through: the diligent commitment of the head of pastoral care to the pupils, supported effectively by key members of the teaching staff; the caring and supportive ethos within the school; the good behaviour of the majority of the pupils; and the successful working of the school alongside other agencies and with the local community.

2.4 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives satisfactory attention to developing aspects of healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the development of practical cookery skills through home economics and the wide range of after-school sporting opportunities available to the pupils. The school needs to extend the range of healthy eating and food related programmes in order to encourage further the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.6 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION

The provision for special educational needs (SEN) is inadequate, and is an area presenting increasingly significant challenge for the school. The SEN support is sensitively and effectively organised by an experienced member of the school leadership team (SLT); she has, however, insufficient time to carry out the many key roles associated with the work. Individual education plans (IEPs) are not fully utilised to guide learning and teaching; at present, a minority of subject areas have modified their lesson planning for differentiated teaching, using information from the SEN register. The school is committed to ensuring that SEN support becomes the collective responsibility of the whole staff and as a first step has recently trained the teachers and classroom assistants in how to develop effective IEPs.

There is a high level of commitment by the school to the inclusion and the education of all of its pupils and in working with parents on a range of related matters. In addition, the school demonstrates a caring commitment to those pupils at risk of marginalisation. For example, in KS4, initiatives such as the Prince's Trust assist in motivating and engaging these pupils. Furthermore, in the last few years, the attendance of the pupils has improved in line with the NI average for non-selective schools. Suspensions have reduced from 67 in 2005/06 to 12 in 2008/09. The number of pupils educated off-site has reduced from 15 in 2007/08 to six in the current academic year and the school maintains regular contact with these pupils, actively pursuing ways of re-integrating them back into mainstream education.

2.7 CAREERS

The provision for careers education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG) is satisfactory. The school offers a variety of programmes and activities which reflect and meet the needs of the majority of the pupils. The work-related learning opportunities contribute effectively to the pupils' knowledge and understanding of employment opportunities locally. The recently appointed CEIAG co-ordinator has identified appropriate areas for development including the need to improve the learning resources in order to ensure the more effective delivery of the CEIAG programme.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Principal is hard-working, and demonstrates a strong commitment to the pastoral care and welfare of the pupils. Over the past three years, she has been successful in leading and working with the teachers on whole-school initiatives designed to improve the physical learning environment, the pupils' behaviour, and the development of a more positive climate for learning.

However, the quality of leadership throughout the school, particularly at senior and middle management needs to improve. Currently, the SLT has not demonstrated the capacity to lead the necessary improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in order to raise standards. The Principal, supported by the governors, needs to review and re-define the roles and leadership responsibilities of all members of the SLT in light of the current needs of the school. In turn, the SLT needs to share the responsibility for, provide proactive leadership of, and support the Principal in, the delivery of key aspects of school improvement. There is good communication between the Principal and the middle management tier within the school, and, appropriately, the school has identified the need to build leadership capacity at middle management level through, for example, the provision of professional development opportunities to support this work.

The school's process for improvement is linked clearly to the school development plan (SDP). In order to comply more fully with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, the SLT needs to consult more widely with governors, parents and pupils when preparing the SDP, and to include a more rigorous assessment of the pupils' progress and standards of attainment. The school, supported by the CASS of the NEELB, has demonstrated a commitment to whole-school and departmental action planning to address areas for development.

The school has introduced standardised baseline testing and is developing target-setting for individual pupils. In developing this work, the SLT will need to make better use of all available data, including benchmarking data, to raise the teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve. Furthermore, the teachers need to use the assessment information to identify and implement more tailored learning programmes, and learning and teaching strategies, in order to meet effectively the needs of all pupils and improve standards.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths of the school include:

- the good quality of the pastoral care;
- the commitment to inclusion, including the improved behaviour and attendance of the pupils, and the reduction in the number of suspensions and pupils educated off-site;

- the positive impact of the work done by the teachers to improve the climate for learning for the pupils, coupled with the improvements in the physical learning environment; and
- the good use made of external links and partnerships.

The areas for improvement are the need:

- to raise the overall standards across the school, including the unsatisfactory levels of attainment in public examinations;
- to raise the expectations of the teachers and the pupils, match more closely the learning and teaching strategies to the abilities and interests of the pupils, and improve the provision in English, mathematics and science; and
- to improve the quality of leadership throughout the school, and for the governors to support the Principal to review and re-define the roles and leadership responsibilities of all members of the SLT in light of the current needs of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate; the areas for improvement significantly outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified major areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the pupils.

It will be important that the employing authority, governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FOR THE SUBJECT AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The quality of the provision for English is inadequate.

The strengths of the work include:

- the positive working relationships between the teachers and most of the pupils in the lessons observed;
- the good quality of teaching observed in a significant minority of lessons;
- the pupils' ability to work well collaboratively, when given the opportunity; and
- the commitment of the teachers to making improvements in the provision for English.

The areas for improvement are:

- to improve the unsatisfactory standards achieved by the pupils in English, particularly those in public examinations; and
- to improve the provision for all pupils in English by ensuring that the learning and teaching strategies are more closely and individually matched to the pupils' abilities, needs and interests.

Mathematics

The quality of the provision for mathematics is inadequate.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils in most of the lessons observed;
- the good start made in addressing the needs of those pupils who require additional support with learning mathematics; and
- the willingness of the pupils, when given the opportunity, to engage in learning.

The areas for improvement are:

- to improve the unsatisfactory standards being achieved by the pupils including those in public examinations;

- the need for the teachers to use a wider range of learning and teaching strategies, across the full ability range, to engage the pupils and extend their knowledge and understanding; and
- to improve the inadequate leadership of mathematics, including developing more effective strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching and attainment.

Science

The quality of the provision for science is inadequate.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between pupils and teachers in most of the lessons observed;
- the willingness of many of the pupils, when given the opportunity, to engage in the learning process; and
- the commitment of the head of science to review the practice within the department.

The areas for improvement are:

- to improve the unsatisfactory standards being achieved by the pupils including those in public examinations;
- to improve the quality of the teachers' short-term planning and classroom practice so that the teaching strategies employed match more closely the ability of all of the pupils; and
- to monitor and evaluate the work of the department to promote improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation for home economics is not in compliance with the recommendations of the DE Building Handbook.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Ballee Community High School v. Date of Inspection: W/C 25.01.10
 ii. School Reference Number: 321-0233 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-16
 iv. Status: Controlled

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 8 Intake	66	57	51	57	77	58
Total enrolment	421	375	335	329	309	300

1.3 Attendance

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	Average 2008/09	NI Average 2007/08
% Attendance	93.5	91.6	90.6	89.7	88.8	91	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 21.6 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 80.7
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 13.9

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	27	36	32	31	33	159
Enrolment: Girls	31	38	25	19	28	141
Enrolment: Total	58	74	57	50	61	300
PTR	14.0	16.7	13.8	12.0	12.9	

1.5 Leavers' Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	94	
Another School	17%	11.3
Employment	13%	8.7
Full-time Further Education	7%	41.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A
Full-time Training	53%	30.3
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	10%	4.4
Unknown/LongTerm Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.5

APPENDIX 4

1.6 NAME OF SCHOOL: Ballee Community High School SCHOOL YEAR: 2009/2010

GCSE	2007	2008	2009
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	65.3	75	69.5
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	12.2	12.5	10.2
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and mathematics	2.0	5	6.8
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	46.9	40	59.3
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	44.9	30	45.8

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE and subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2009, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

Table 1

	More than 10 percentage points above	Between 5 and 10 percentage points above	Within 5 percentage points	Between 5 and 10 percentage points below	More than 10 percentage points below
GCSE A*-C	Hospitality		Art & Design Business Communication Construction*	Business Studies* ⁺	Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Geography History Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Music* Religious Studies* Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies*
GCSE A*-E		Business communication Hospitality	Art & Design	Business Studies* Information Technology	Construction* Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Geography History Home Economics Child Development Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Music* Religious Studies* Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies*

⁺ denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over 3 years

Table showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.

Table 2

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A*-C			Art & Design Information Technology Music	Double Award Science 1 st Subject Home Economics Child Development	Business Communication Business Studies Construction Design and Technology English Geography History Hospitality Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	Double Award Science 1 st Subject	Art & Design Business Communication English French History Home Economics Child Development Information Technology Music Religious Studies Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies Construction Design and Technology Geography Mathematics Single Award Science	Hospitality Motor Vehicle Studies	

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