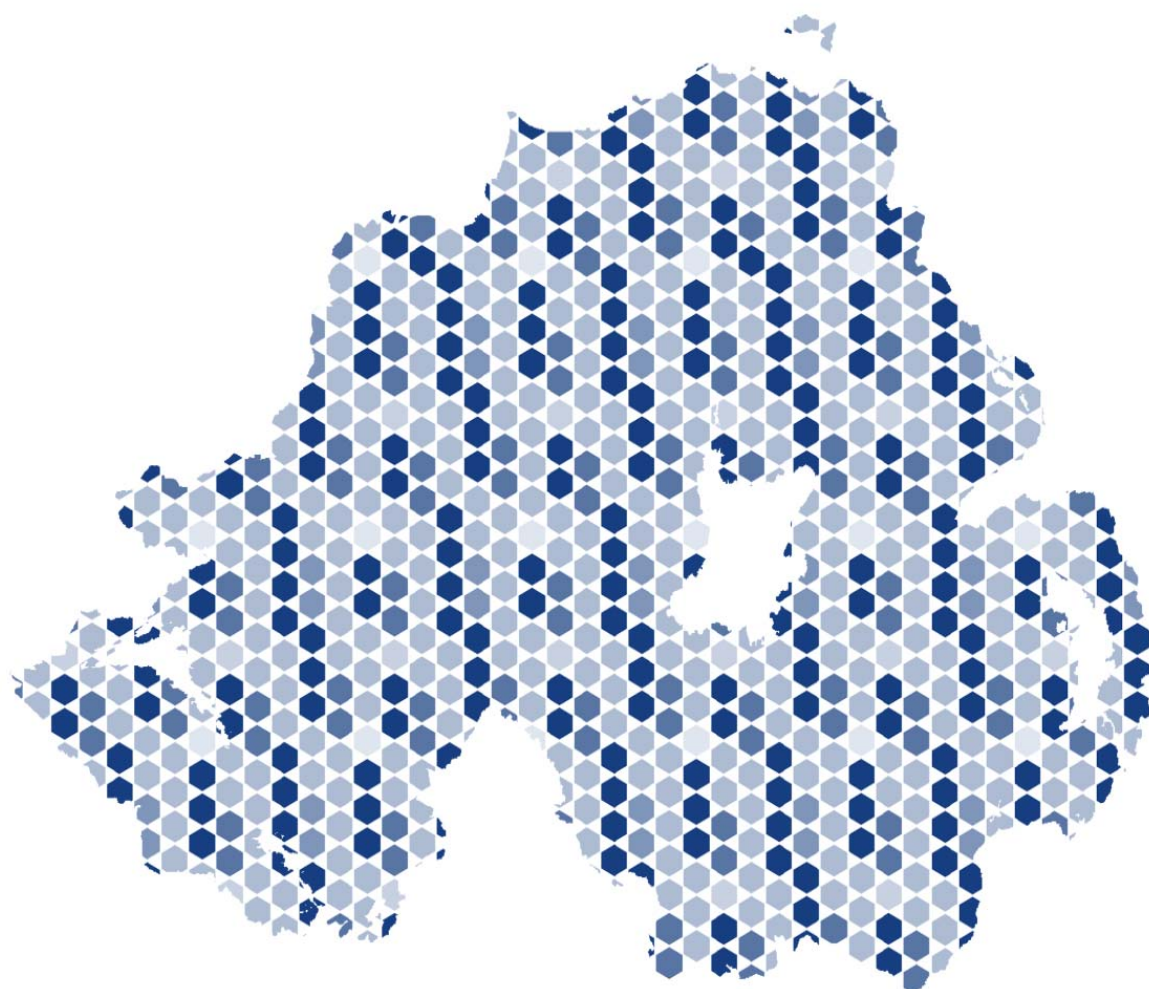


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Strabane High School,
Co Tyrone

Report of an Inspection
in April 2010

CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK	2
3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS	4
4. MAIN FINDINGS	5
5. CONCLUSION	5
APPENDICES	

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, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Strabane High School is a non-selective, 11-16, co-educational, controlled school situated on the northern outskirts of Strabane. The pupils come from a wide rural catchment. The enrolment has been increasing steadily over the last three years and currently stands at 300. Approximately 38% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified almost 32% of the pupils as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Negotiations to amalgamate Strabane High School with Strabane Grammar School have been taking place since 2003.

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

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching staff and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. In addition, meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of pupils from years 8, 10 and 12.

Sixty questionnaires were issued to parents; 33 (55%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 20 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires, and most of the comments from the parents, indicated high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. In particular, they mentioned the pupil-centred ethos, the range of extra-curricular activities and the hard work and dedication of the acting Principal and the teachers. The few issues raised by the parents were reported to the Acting-principal and the governors.

Twenty-three teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, and nine provided additional written comments. Fifteen support staff also completed questionnaires and one of them provided additional written comments. All the staff enjoy working in the school; they appreciate the support of the Acting principal and senior managers at a time of great uncertainty for the school. Just over half of the teachers felt that pupils were not involved sufficiently in the school's decision-making processes. A small number of teachers reported that communication within the school needs to be more effective and that inappropriate behaviour by some pupils is not being addressed consistently or effectively.

In the discussions held with groups of pupils in years 8, 10 and 12, the pupils talked enthusiastically about the support they receive from the teachers, the good range of extra-curricular activities, including those on offer through the extended schools' programme, and the education visits organised to places of interest to enhance their learning experiences. There is clear evidence to show that they are aware of what to do, and who to talk to, if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

The governors talked enthusiastically about their role in the life of the school. They value highly the work of the Acting-principal and the staff. They feel that there has been a significant improvement in staff morale and that the standards achieved by the pupils have improved since the appointment of the current Acting-principal. They reported that the school was held in high regard by the local community. They reported, however, that the protracted negotiations over the merger of the school with Strabane Grammar School has caused difficulties for the whole school community.

1.3 FOCUS

The inspection focused on leadership and management at all levels across the school and, in addition, on the provision for English and mathematics. The provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and the arrangements for the inclusion of these pupils in all aspects of school life was also inspected. The provision for pastoral care; the arrangements for child protection; and the school's programme for careers education, information, advice and guidance were evaluated; as was the approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. As an additional evidence base for the inspection, lessons were observed across a range of other subjects.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' WORK

2.1 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The pupils are confident and articulate. They are highly motivated and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They show a very strong sense of pride in their school and are conscientious in the manner in which they treat their surroundings. They benefit from a range of teaching approaches and respond well to the teachers' high expectations. Nearly all of the pupils co-operated well with their teachers and peers during the lessons observed.

The standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations have improved over recent years. In the past three years, the number of pupils entered for five or more General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) has increased significantly rising from 78% three years ago to its present level of 96%. Over the same period, the results have improved from 43.5% of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more GCSEs to 47% last academic year. This shows a significant increase on the corresponding figure five years ago which stood at 23%. The numbers of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics over the past three years ranges from average to well above average when compared with similar schools. The results in the majority of subjects are within five percentage points, or more than five percentage points above, the average for non-selective schools for grades A*-C. More details about the examination results are given in appendices B and C.

The school is making good progress towards providing a suitably broad and balanced curriculum which meets the ability and career aspirations of all of the pupils. It regards its collaboration with other education providers as a strategic priority and is making a good contribution to the development of the Derg Mourne Learning Community.

2.2 THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

2.2.1 THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Inspectors observed 39 lessons during the inspection of which 90% were good or very good. In nearly all lessons there was an atmosphere of mutual respect and teachers set high expectations of the pupils to which they responded positively. The lessons were well-planned and met the needs of all of the pupils effectively. There was an appropriate pace to almost all the lessons and teachers used the time available to good effect. Learning objectives were identified at the outset of the lesson and the lesson was managed effectively to allow time for the extent to which the pupils had learned the key points to be assessed. In the best practice, the teachers used effective questioning techniques to assess the pupils' prior knowledge and understanding of the topic and to reinforce and consolidate key learning points. The pupils work well individually and collaboratively in pairs and groups. They demonstrate increasing independence and autonomy and many become effective partners in their own learning.

More detailed evaluation of the subjects under focus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2.2 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The teachers and support staff with responsibility for pastoral care give high priority to the emotional health and well-being of the pupils. The strengths of the provision include: the exemplary behaviour of most of the pupils; the atmosphere of mutual respect which is evident between staff and pupils throughout the school and which is conducive to quality learning and teaching; the effective programme for year 8 induction and the successful working alongside other agencies and the wider community.

2.2.3 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by DE but the following areas need to be addressed: the school needs to develop procedures to consult further with parents and pupils in aspects of school life and a written summary of the arrangements for child protection should be made available to the parents, at least every two years.

2.2.4 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through participation and success in the Health Promoting Schools Award scheme, in which it achieves significant success, and the Step for Health Challenge. The school needs, however, to consult more effectively with the pupils, parents and staff in order to develop further the school's healthy eating programme.

2.2.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION

The provision for special educational needs (SEN) is very good. It is organised sensitively and effectively by a member of the school management team who is supported very well by the Acting-principal and the teaching staff.

The school is committed to ensuring that SEN support becomes the collective responsibility of the whole staff with a strong focus on good working relationships at all levels. In recent years, the teachers, together with the support staff, have received training in supporting additional learning needs. Individual education plans (IEPs) are designed to ensure their manageability and suitability and are effectively used to guide learning and teaching. In class, the support staff are well deployed and carry out their roles in a highly professional and pro-active manner; their work makes a significant contribution to the pastoral and academic needs of the pupils. Initiatives, including a reading club, which is open to all year 8 pupils, and reading partnerships are having a positive impact on the pupils' motivation and progress in literacy. The impact of the support provided for the pupils is illustrated by the fact that, in the previous academic year, 26 pupils made sufficient progress to allow them to be removed from the special needs register.

There is a high level of commitment by the school to the inclusion and the education of all of its pupils. In addition, the school demonstrates a caring commitment to those few pupils who are at risk of marginalisation. In the last few years, the attendance of the pupils has improved and is above the NI average for non-selective schools. The number of pupils

being suspended has reduced from 43 in 2004/05 to two in 2008/09. The number of pupils educated off-site has reduced from four in 2005/06 to one in the current academic year. The school maintains regular contact with these pupils, actively pursuing ways of ensuring they have access to GCSE examinations and/or work placement.

2.2.6 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The quality of provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is satisfactory. The pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop effective career decision-making skills and to gain an understanding of the world of work and of the education, training and employment opportunities that are available locally and regionally. The head of department has a clear understanding of the strategic development of CEIAG across the school, including its contribution to school improvement but the contributory aspects of the curriculum need to be more explicit in the overall CEIAG programme. A good start has been made to monitoring and evaluating the provision for CEIAG; the outcomes of these self-evaluation processes need to be used more effectively to inform planning in order to enhance further the delivery of the programmes. The school provides good accommodation and learning resources for the delivery of the CEIAG programme; the pupils, however, need greater access to these resources during non-teaching time. Moreover, there is insufficient additional advice and guidance on careers for the year 10 pupils as they make their subject choices for GCSE.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Acting-principal has been in post since September 2006. He is hard-working and committed, and provides strong pastoral leadership for the pupils and staff. He has the confidence of the staff and governors and the respect of the pupils. With the acting Vice-principal, and other members of the senior management team, he has led the staff very successfully in bringing about significant improvements in the quality of the educational provision provided by the school and, in particular, the standards achieved by the pupils.

The school has made a good start to embedding a culture of self-evaluation to bring about sustained improvement. A particular strength is the extent to which the school is recording a range of assessment and performance data and is benchmarking this appropriately against the performance of other similar schools. A number of subject departments are using this data to set targets for improvement. The school's development plan identifies appropriately the key areas for development; these areas are developed further in detailed action plans at departmental level. It is appropriate that these priorities focus on the need to consolidate the improvements in the pupils' achievements and raise still further the standards attained in external examinations. There is, however, a need to ensure that meaningful consultation takes place with the whole school community in agreeing key targets for the school and to put effective structures in place to monitor and evaluate the progress made. In its current form the school's development plan does not comply fully with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations Northern Ireland (NI) 2005 Order and should be reviewed.

The Board of Governors is committed to the work of the school and offers very good support to the Acting principal. They give generously of their time and are well-informed about the work of the school and the standards achieved by the pupils.

It will be important that the governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the school. It would be in the best interests of the school to have the negotiations around the proposed amalgamation resolved as quickly as possible.

4. **MAIN FINDINGS**

The main strengths of the school include:

- the exemplary behaviour of the vast majority of the pupils and their positive attitudes towards their learning;
- the very good quality of the provision for pastoral care;
- the hard-working teachers and the high quality of the teaching observed;
- the very good quality of the provision for those pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the good quality of the provision in English and mathematics; and
- the very good leadership of the Acting principal, effectively supported by the acting Vice-principal, the senior management team and the Board of Governors.

5. **CONCLUSION**

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

English

The quality of provision in English is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the quality of the teaching, all of which is good or very good;
- the good start made to implementing the Northern Ireland Curriculum, particularly in relation to revised schemes of work for key stage 3 (KS3);
- the department's approach to self-evaluation which identifies appropriate areas for development;
- the good leadership demonstrated by the head of department in relation to improving standards in public examinations; and
- the good standard of extended writing, in a range of genres, in the pupils' folders and on display.

An area for improvement is:

- the need for a more strategic approach to addressing issues for development or improvement.

Mathematics

The quality of provision in mathematics is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or very good;
- the motivated pupils and their ability to learn collaboratively;
- the appropriately wide range of learning and teaching strategies used which engage the pupils in their learning;
- the good progress in reviewing the scheme of work for KS3; and
- the good leadership provided by the head of mathematics and the hard-working departmental team.

The areas for improvement are:

- to raise the levels of attainment at KS3 and at GCSE; and
- to develop further self-evaluation to promote improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Strabane High
 ii. School Reference Number: 221-0164
 iii. Age Range: 11-17
 iv. Status: Controlled
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 19/04/10
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 8 Intake	52	64	57	55	64
Total enrolment	261	259	271	283	300

1.3 Attendance

Year 2008/09	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2008/09	NI Average 2007/08
% Attendance	93.9	92	90.5	89.4	93.8	0	0	92	90

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers:

21.83

- iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact):

0.76

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

13.79

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	39	32	35	38	27	0	0	171
Enrolment: Girls	25	22	23	33	26	0	0	129
Enrolment: Total	64	54	58	71	53	0	0	300
PTR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

1.5 Leavers' Destinations

2007/08	Year 12	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	49	
Another School	33%	11.3
Employment	8%	8.7
Full-time Further Education	27%	41.8
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A
Full-time Training	29%	30.3
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	4%	4.4
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	3.5

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Strabane High School SCHOOL YEAR: 2009/2010

GCSE	2007	2008	2009
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	77.78	95.56	95.56
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	44.44	55.56	46.67
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	31.11	31.11	22.22
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	77.78	91.11	93.33

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table showing the GCSE 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	History Motor Vehicle Studies	Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Music	Design and Technology Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Geography Mathematics Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies		Art and Design Design and Technology: Resistance English Literature Home Economics Office Technology Religious Studies
GCSE A*-E	History Single Award Science	Design and Technology English Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Motor Vehicle Studies Music Office Technology	Art and Design Design and Technology: Resistance Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature Geography Mathematics Sport/PE Studies	Religious Studies	Home Economics

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 and Design Music	Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature	Business Studies Design and Technology Design and Technology: Resistance English French Geography History Home Economics Home Economics Child Development Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies
GCSE A*-E	Double Award Science 1 st Subject English Literature	Art and Design English French History Home Economics Home Economics Child Development Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Music Office Technology Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport/PE Studies	Business Studies Design and Technology Design and Technology: Resistance Geography Mathematics	Motor Vehicle Studies	

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