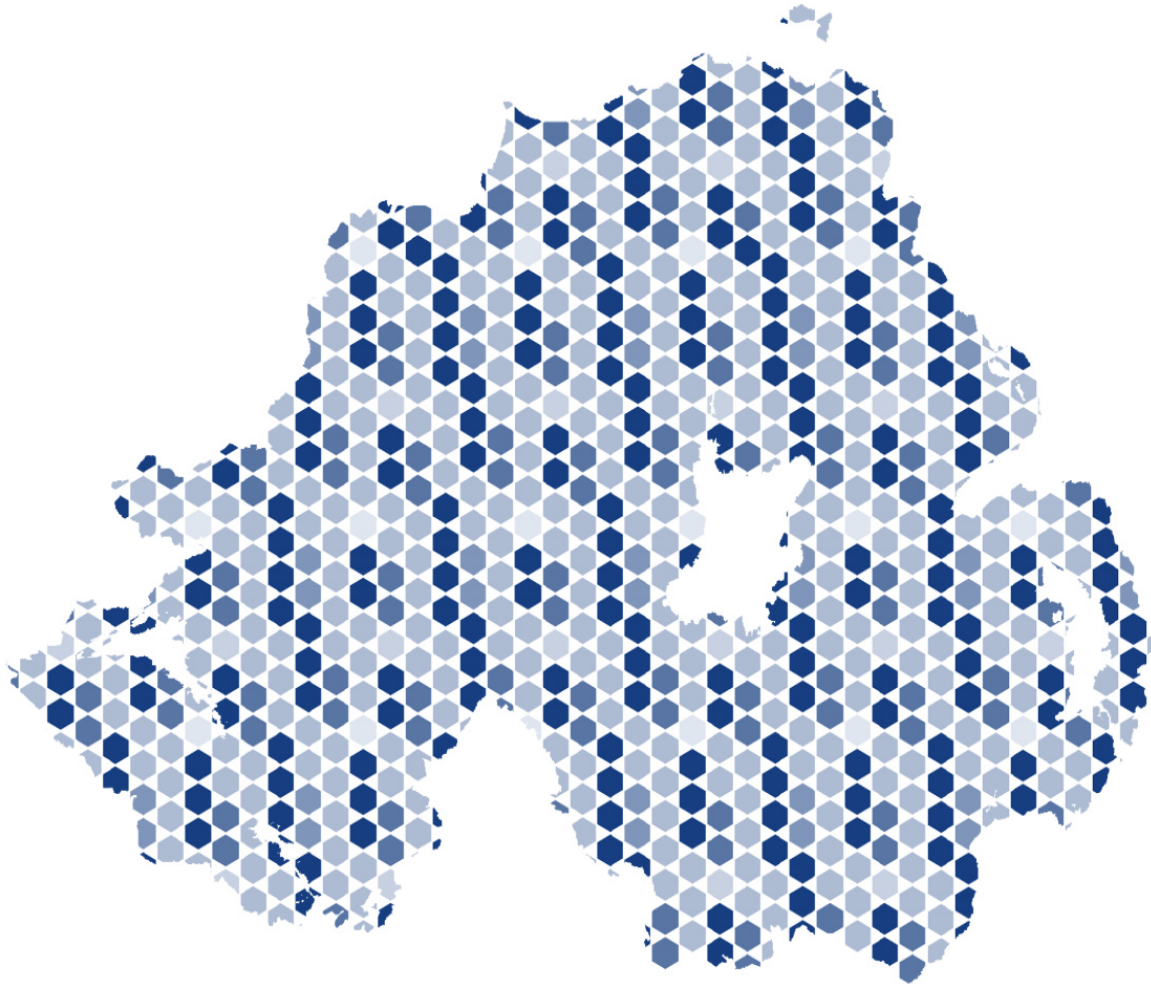


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Strathearn School, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in September 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, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Strathearn School is a voluntary grammar school for girls situated on the Belmont Road in East Belfast. The school draws most of its pupils from a number of primary schools in East Belfast and North Down. The current enrolment is 755 pupils with just over 25% of the pupils in the sixth form; the enrolment has remained steady over the last three years. Approximately 3% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school has identified just over 10% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning. The provision of a new school building is at an advanced stage of planning with construction work expected to commence early in 2011.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- provision across a wide range of subjects with a particular focus in English, modern languages and physical education, including the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum;
- the progress being made towards an extended curriculum;
- the views of the pupils, parents, teachers, support staff and the Board of Governors (governors);
- the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection;
- the approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity;
- the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life;
- the provision for careers, education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG); and
- leadership and management at all levels across the school.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is very good.

2.1 The main strengths of the school include:

- the highly motivated, articulate and enthusiastic pupils who achieve very good standards in public examinations;
- the very good quality of pastoral care and the very effective links between the pastoral care system and the special educational needs (SEN) provision;

- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, four-fifths of which was good or better;
- the outstanding leadership of the Principal, supported competently by the two Vice-principals and by the governors, who have identified appropriate actions to promote further improvement;
- the commitment and dedication of the teachers who have worked hard to develop the very good working relationships among the pupils and between the pupils and teachers; and
- the extensive range of sporting, social, cultural and extra-curricular activities which add significantly to the pupils' overall education experience.

2.2 A summary of the main findings for the specialist subject areas under focus can be found in Appendix 1.

3. THE VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF AND GOVERNORS OF THE SCHOOL

3.1 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 governors and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

3.2 One hundred and forty-nine questionnaires were issued to parents; 37% were returned to Inspection Services Branch and 32 contained additional written comments.

3.3 Most of the responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the work and life of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the approachable, enthusiastic and dedicated teachers, the highly effective leadership of the Principal, the strong sense of community and positive ethos of the school, the appropriate balance between the academic and pastoral aspects of school life, the positive response by staff to individual concerns and the friendly, welcoming atmosphere within the school.

3.4 Seventeen teachers and 15 support staff completed confidential questionnaires with 13 teachers and four support staff providing additional written comments. Nearly all of the teaching and support staff expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the work and life of the school. In particular, the staff highlighted the warmth and humour evident at all levels throughout the school, the excellent relationships that exist between the staff and pupils and the very effective leadership provided by the Principal and senior management team (SMT) who have a genuine interest in the personal and professional welfare of all the staff.

3.5 The governors expressed their strong support for the school, highlighting their supportive and active involvement in all aspects of school life. They also expressed their high regard for the work of the Principal, the SMT and the teaching and non-teaching staff.

3.6 In discussions held with the pupils, they reported that they felt safe and secure in school and were aware of what to do if they had any concerns about their safety and well-being. They talked unreservedly about the caring and friendly ethos of the school; and in particular, discussed the commitment of the teaching staff in providing the best academic and pastoral support possible.

3.7 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the very few areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

4 KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The pupils develop well and have very good levels of achievement. In the course of the inspection, the pupils showed high levels of motivation, engagement in their learning and appropriate expectations of what they could achieve; when given the opportunity they gave confident and articulate responses and worked collaboratively with their peers in group or paired activities. The pupils, including those with identified special needs, demonstrated continuing improvement in their learning; they showed a pride in their school and their behaviour was exemplary.

The pupils have excellent opportunities to engage in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting, social, and cultural activities which add significantly to their overall education experience.

The levels of attainment in public examinations are very good.

At General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) the pupils' achievement in grades A*-C in at least seven subjects including English and mathematics is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar selective schools; in 2010 all of the pupils achieved grades A*-C in at least seven subjects including English and mathematics. Furthermore, over the corresponding period, most of the pupils achieved grades A*-B in at least seven GCSE subjects with nearly all of the subjects either within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average. In almost one-fifth of subjects, these results are more than ten percentage points above the NI average. The pupils with additional learning needs attain very well in the public examinations.

The percentage of pupils achieving grade A-C in three or more A Levels has shown some variation over the past three years, however, over the corresponding period, this has remained above the average for similar schools, with almost half of the subjects either five or ten percentage points above the respective NI average at GCE grades A*-C. The SMT has recognised the need to address this variation in attainment and has responded appropriately through the development of greater accountability structures at middle management level and the introduction of well-targeted staff development opportunities to develop further strategies to improve learning and teaching.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 3.

4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The teaching, learning and assessment in the provision observed is very good.

4.2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory with four-fifths of lessons being evaluated as good or better.

In the more effective practice, teachers and pupils focused appropriately on developing a range of skills that supported independent learning. The work built effectively on previous learning and the pupils, including those identified with needing additional support with their learning, had well-planned opportunities to participate in active and enjoyable learning experiences; in some of the lessons, ICT was used effectively to enhance the pupils' learning.

In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons observed, the work was over-directed by the teacher and the pupils had fewer opportunities to interact with each other and develop their thinking.

4.2.2 CURRICULUM PROVISION

The Principal and SMT have a clear vision and strong commitment to the rationale which underpins the aims of the Entitlement Framework. The school is making very good progress towards providing a suitably broad and balanced curriculum for post-16 pupils, which is relevant to the pupils' interests, abilities and career aspirations. There is very good collaboration between the school and other education providers, including the further education sector. The school is making a very good contribution to the work of the East Belfast Area Learning Community and has established arrangements for the evaluation of their progress towards implementation of the Entitlement Framework, which are outlined within the school development plan.

4.2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The Vice-principal responsible for pastoral care provides highly effective and strategic leadership. She is supported well by a committed and dedicated multi-disciplinary pastoral team who bring skills from teaching and non-teaching backgrounds. The staff make positive formal and informal contributions to supporting the education, health and well-being of the pupils. The whole-school collaborative approach is appropriately linked to the school development plan. The working relationships between the pupils and staff, and among pupils themselves, are very strong and a caring, friendly atmosphere is evident throughout the school. The school creates very good opportunities for pupils to accept responsibility through a range of initiatives designed to meet their specific needs. For example, the development of the new student council is enabling consultation between pupils, staff and the SMT.

The quality of provision for those pupils with special needs is very good; the provision is linked very effectively with the pastoral care system in the school. The school makes an early identification of those pupils in need of additional support and provides prompt and well targeted support to meet their intellectual and emotional needs. Very good support is given to the pupils by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and Learning Support Tutor, who both have excellent working relationships with the pupils.

4.2.4 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

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

4.2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through for example, the Healthy Breakfast Week and the important role of the Sixth Form Health Promotion Committee. The area for improvement identified is to ensure that all food provision in school complies with the nutritional standards to ensure a whole-school approach to healthy eating.

4.2.6 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (CEIAG)

The overall quality of the careers, education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is good. The Principal, supported by the Vice-principals, has a strong strategic vision for the provision of high quality CEIAG, which is demonstrated by his appointment of a dedicated careers adviser. The school, through the commitment, hard work and enthusiasm of the careers adviser, has established extensive, meaningful links with a wide range of business, industry and further and higher education partners. In addition, she provides the pupils with access to individual careers advice and guidance interviews, particularly at key transition stages.

The comprehensive CEIAG curricular programme for the sixth form pupils is effectively monitored and evaluated and provides very good opportunities for them to make informed career choices. However, at key stage (KS) 3 and KS4 there is a lack of curricular integration of the employability strand of Learning for Life and Work within the school's CEIAG programme. There is a need for a review to ensure that all provision is equally well co-ordinated, delivered and evaluated by the appropriate staff to ensure continuing improvement.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The overall quality of leadership and management in the school is very good.

5.2 The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is outstanding. Since taking up his appointment thirteen years ago, the Principal has worked with the school community with great energy and commitment to develop a clear strategic vision for the school, including the development and implementation of a more effective and distributive leadership and management structure, which has an appropriate focus on learning and teaching and meeting the needs of all the pupils. He adopts a measured and strategic approach to organisational development, is sensitive to his colleagues' developmental needs and is supportive of them in managing change. He sets a positive tone for the work of the school and is supported competently by the two Vice-principals who are complementary in the strengths which they bring to their respective leadership and management roles; there is a particular strength in the analytical approach taken to reviewing and evaluating practice and learning outcomes to inform effective action planning for improvement.

5.3 There is a clear and appropriate commitment to develop further the leadership role and professional capacity of middle managers, in particular the heads of departments and co-ordinators. The senior management team is developing the accountability of heads of department for quality and standards, and enabling them to implement a process of continuing improvement by making more effective use of the analysis of value-added data.

5.4 Effective systems of monitoring and self-evaluation, including the use of quantitative and qualitative data are used systematically to identify areas for improvement and to inform strategic school development planning. A particular feature of the whole-school planning is the well-conceived programme of staff development which, in addition to external support, makes effective use of existing expertise within the school and is appropriately linked to the main priorities identified in the school development plan. The school development plan meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

5.5 There is very good communication between the Principal and the governors; the governors are hard-working and highly committed to the whole school community. They are well informed about school developments, and are involved appropriately in decisions regarding the strategic direction and development of the school.

5.6 The school deploys its financial resources appropriately, providing pupils with a suitable curriculum, making effective use of all available resources and in doing so, providing good value for money.

6. **CONCLUSION**

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

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

English

The quality of provision in English is very good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the consistently excellent outcomes achieved by the pupils in English and English Literature at GCSE and A level;
- the quality of the teaching observed, over four-fifths of which was good or very good in generally equal measure;
- the inclusive ethos and good rapport between the teachers and pupils in nearly all of the lessons observed;
- the teachers' commitment to providing an appealing extra-curricular programme that supports the development of English skills;
- the judicious use of data to inform learning and teaching; and
- the very good leadership provided by the Head of Department.

Modern Languages

The quality of provision in Modern Languages is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the staff and the pupils, and between the pupils, which are of a consistently high quality and are based on mutual respect;
- the enjoyment and engagement which the pupils have in language learning, and the positive response to the range of activities provided by the teachers both in and outside of the classroom;
- the improving trend in attainment in external examinations in French and Spanish, and in the numbers studying languages at A level;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or very good in three-quarters of the lessons observed;
- the wide range of appropriate materials and activities to engage the pupils' interest, to increase their active participation, and to develop their language skills, including the effective use of ICT to enhance learning; and
- the good and effective leadership of the Head of Department, which is focused on improving teaching and learning, and on improving the attainments of the pupils.

The areas for improvement are the need:

- to continue to develop the range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of all of the pupils, through extending their oral and written responses; and
- to improve the standards of attainment in German.

Physical Education

The quality of the provision for Physical Education (PE) is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the positive ethos and supportive learning environment;
- the good leadership provided by the Head of Department;
- the very high levels of participation and good standards achieved in PE lessons;
- the quality of teaching which was very good in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the enthusiastic, committed, hard working teachers; and
- the wide range of extra curricular activities and the sporting successes of the school.

An area for improvement is the need:

- to develop strategies for self evaluation within the PE department and raise the standards achieved by the pupils at GCSE.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Strathearn School v. Date of Inspection: W/C 27/09/10
 ii. School Reference Number: 142-0089 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 8 Intake	110	109	111	110	110
Total enrolment	763	758	744	749	756

1.3 Attendance

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2009/10	NI Average 2008/09
% Attendance	97.28	95.73	95.17	95.24	94.98	93.82	92.42	96	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 49.07 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.753
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 15.448

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Girls	110	119	118	111	107	97	94	756
Enrolment: Total	110	119	118	111	107	97	94	756
PTR	16.56	17.92	17.76	14.85	14.1	12.46	15.23	

- 1.5 Staying On Rate (2008/09) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	89.5	NI Av Year 13	92.6
Year 14	86.1	NI Av Year 14	86.4

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2009/10	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	14		100	
Another School	57%	24.1	0%	1.3
Employment	0%	3	0%	3.4
Full-time Further Education	36%	58.9	9%	9.5
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	80%	82.8
Full-time Training	0%	6.4	0%	0.4
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	7%	1.7	4%	1
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	5.9	7%	1.6

APPENDIX 3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: Strathearn School, Belfast SCHOOL YEAR: 2010/2011

GCSE	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	97.2	96.5	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	95.4	93	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics	94.4	91.2	100
GCE A2 Level or equivalent	2008	2009	2010
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	80.6	71.4	79.8
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 3 A2 levels	100	100	98.9

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Table 1 showing the GCSE subject results over the previous three years ending in June 2010, in comparison with respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

	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*-B	Additional Mathematics Chemistry Double Award Science 1st Subject Geography	English English Literature History Mathematics Physics	Biology Drama Fine Art French Home Economics Information Technology Music Religious Studies Spanish	Design and Technology Sport (PE) Studies	Art & Design German
GCSE A*-C			Additional Mathematics Art & Design Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject Drama English English Literature Fine Art French Geography History Home Economics Information Technology Mathematics Music Physics Religious Studies Spanish	Sport (PE) Studies	German
GCE A*-C	Design and Technology * German * Music *	English Literature French Geography Media Film and TV Studies Physics Religious Studies	Art & Design * Biology Chinese Further Mathematics History Home Economics Mathematics Spanish *	Politics *	Chemistry Information Technology

*Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 over 3 years

Table 2 showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCSE A*-B	Chinese	Art & Design Drama English Fine Art Information Technology Music Sport(PE) Studies	English Literature Geography History Home Economics Mathematics Mathematics Additional Physics Religious Studies Single Award Science	Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject French Spanish	German
GCSE A*-C	Art & Design Chinese Drama English English Literature Fine Art History Home Economics Information Technology Mathematics Music	Additional Mathematics Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Double Award Science 1st Subject French Geography Physics Religious Studies Single Award Science Spanish Sport(PE) Studies	German		
GCE A*-C	Chinese	Art & Design English Literature French Further Mathematics Geography German History Home Economics Mathematics Media Film and TV Studies Music Politics Religious Studies Spanish	Biology Chemistry Design and Technology Information Technology Physics		

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