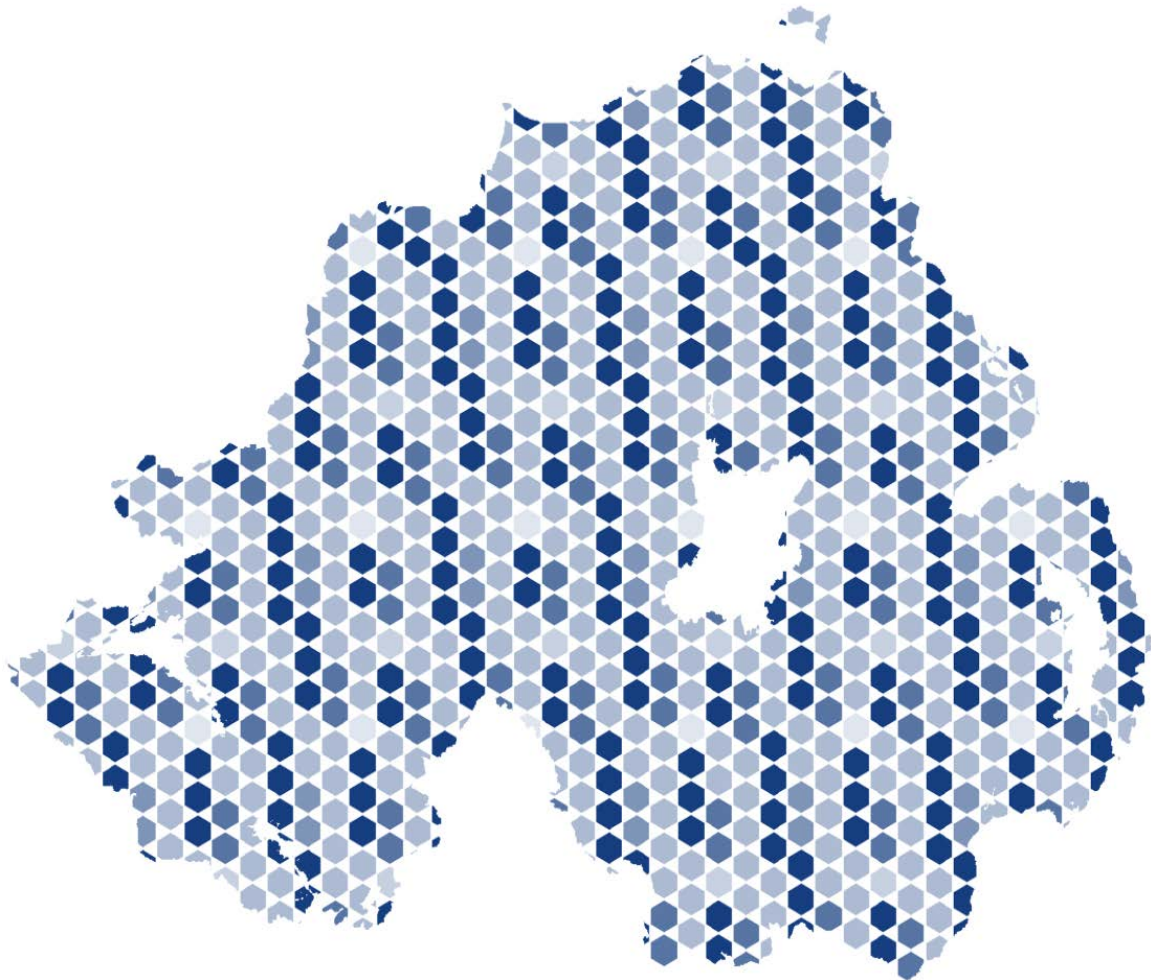


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Strabane Academy, Strabane,  
County Tyrone

Controlled, co-educational, 11-18, all-ability grammar school

Report of a Follow-up Inspection  
(Involving Action Short of Strike)  
in March 2018



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### **THIRD FOLLOW-UP TO THE BASELINE INSPECTION OF STRABANE ACADEMY, BT82 8NW (241-0311)**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a second follow-up inspection of Strabane Academy in September 2016<sup>1</sup> which concluded that the school needed to address important areas for improvement. As a result, the school remained in the follow-up process.

The areas for improvement identified at the second follow-up inspection were the need to:

- continue to improve the quality of the lesson planning and teaching to meet individual pupils' needs and support their progress in learning; and
- build further the capacity of middle leaders to monitor and evaluate the provision in their areas of responsibility in a more systematic and consistent manner to bring about sustainable improvement at GCSE level.

During the second follow-up inspection, the quality of the provision in English and mathematics remained an important area for improvement.<sup>2</sup>

The school's action plans were focused sharply on improvement and the progress made was discussed with the school during the interim follow-up inspection visit (IFuV) carried out by the ETI in May 2017. The IFuV was impacted by action short of strike. The school reports that the Education Authority have provided good support since the second follow-up inspection. A third follow-up inspection was conducted in March 2018.

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that just over two-fifths of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the third follow-up inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

In the interval since the second follow-up inspection, the actions or changes which affect the work of the school include:

- the senior leadership team (SLT) has been re-structured and three new senior teacher posts have been created;
- new heads of department in English and mathematics have been appointed;
- a range of intervention, mentoring and support strategies have been put in place to support pupils at GCSE level;
- the school has embarked on a whole-school professional development programme focused on effective learning and teaching and the development of middle management;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/follow-inspection-strabane-academy-strabane-county-tyrone>

<sup>2</sup> During the first follow-up inspection, the quality of the provision for English and mathematics was evaluated as satisfactory. Since September 2016, satisfactory is reported as 'Important area(s) for improvement'.

- the year 8 intake has increased by 16% from 75 to 89 pupils; and
- the curriculum has been restructured to allow pupils to access a wider range of post-16 subjects.

### **Views of parents and staff**

A very small number (6) of parents and 29% of staff responded to the re-issued online questionnaire. In the very small number of parental responses, nearly all expressed satisfaction with their child's progress at school and in particular with the range of subjects and learning experiences. The responses from the staff were also mostly positive and highlighted an appreciation for staff development opportunities and a strong awareness in relation to safeguarding. Any issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed with representatives of the governors and the principal.

### **Key findings**

Overall, attainment in public examinations continues to have important areas for improvement.

At post-16, the proportion of pupils attaining at grades A\* to C in three or more A levels or equivalent has fallen well below the Northern Ireland (NI) average for all schools.

Overall, outcomes at GCSE level or equivalent are improving. Last year the percentage of all year 12 pupils attaining at grades A\* to C in at least five GCSE subjects or equivalent increased from 73% to 90%. This is above the NI average when compared with all schools.

At Key Stage (KS) 4, over the past three years, the more able pupils are performing favourably when the outcomes they attain are compared with headline benchmarks for selective schools in the same free schools meals band.

The attainment of the remaining pupils (following the two other learning pathways out of the three available at KS 4) has improved from the time of the second follow-up inspection; however, the outcomes achieved at GCSE level or equivalent remain an important area for improvement. While the proportion of these pupils attaining at grades A\* to C in at least five GCSE subjects increased last year to 67%, it remains below the corresponding NI average for non-selective schools. The school has implemented a range of intervention, mentoring and support strategies to address this area for improvement.

In English, over the past three years, outcomes at GCSE level have fluctuated. The proportion of pupils in all three pathways attaining grades A\* to C in GCSE English language is now in line with the NI average for all schools; the proportion of the more able pupils attaining A\* to B in this subject has risen, and is now in line with the NI average for selective schools. While the numbers of the more able pupils entered for GCSE English literature have risen since 2015, the proportion attaining grades A\* to B has fluctuated; the outcomes remain well below the corresponding NI average for selective schools and require further improvement.

Over the same period, the standards attained by the small number of pupils in GCE A level English literature have improved; the proportion of pupils attaining A\* to C grades is in line with the NI average. A significantly higher number of pupils were entered for this examination at this level in 2017 and all attained at grades A\* to C.

In mathematics, over the past three years, the school's performance in GCSE mathematics is in line with the NI average for all schools, at grades A\* to C and at grades A\* to B. Last year the proportion of the more able pupils attaining at grades A\* to B in GCSE mathematics was in line with the NI average for selective schools. Attainment at grades A\* to B for GCSE further mathematics has fallen well below the NI average for selective schools. The standards achieved by the pupils who take GCE A level mathematics are well above the NI average in two of the last three years; in 2017, attainment was in line with the NI average.

Clear priority has been given to establishing a focus on pedagogy; an understanding of effective learning and teaching underpins the agreed improvement agenda. All of the lessons observed during this follow-up inspection were highly effective in promoting learning. The current review of planning for learning, teaching and assessment at KS 3 is focused on promoting the development of a wider skills base to prepare pupils better for KS 4 and beyond.

First-hand evidence and evaluation are informing better the provision within the learning pathways at KS 4 and the curriculum at post-16 level. With an increasing responsiveness to the needs, aspirations and abilities of all of the pupils, there is evidence that aspects of further curriculum changes are impacting positively on the pupils' learning and engagement.

All of the pupils with whom inspectors met report that they feel safe in school and know whom to turn to if they are worried. The younger pupils reported that they enjoy their learning most when the teachers plan their work in a structured way, take time to explain the more difficult concepts and check at the end of the lesson on the depth of their understanding. The older pupils reported that the teachers help them learn on a one-to-one basis and treat them with respect. In particular these pupils enjoy group work, practical and interactive learning in real life and meaningful contexts; they report that they are encouraged to ask questions in class to ascertain the level of their understanding and the degree of development of their skills.

The SLT are highly committed to developing further their areas of responsibility and to contributing to whole-school improvement. Working cohesively, they have focused appropriately on building further the knowledge and skills of middle managers through well-targeted staff development. This important work is designed well to enable the middle managers to monitor and evaluate the provision in their areas more effectively.

There is a sharper, more adept use of data to set targets, track progress and celebrate achievement across the school; this includes a recent and important review of the tracking system. The teachers at all levels avail of opportunities to undertake additional roles of responsibility and to lead and contribute to important areas of school improvement. Importantly, the focus of this work remains on meeting effectively the needs of each pupil through helping them to reach their potential.

Owing to action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the impact of improvement actions taken and the extent to which the following areas for improvement identified at the second follow-up inspection have been addressed, namely the need to:

- continue to improve the quality of the lesson planning and teaching to meet individual pupils' needs and support their progress in learning; and
- build further the capacity of middle leaders to monitor and evaluate the provision in their areas of responsibility in a more systematic and consistent manner to bring about sustainable improvement at GCSE level.

Consequently, there remains a need for Strabane Academy to continue to address the areas for improvement.

### **Conclusion**

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the pupils. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

The school may require external support to address the areas for improvement outlined in the key findings above<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Department of Education will seek assurance from the Education Authority (and/or employing authority) that they are working with the school in relation to the inspection report.

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