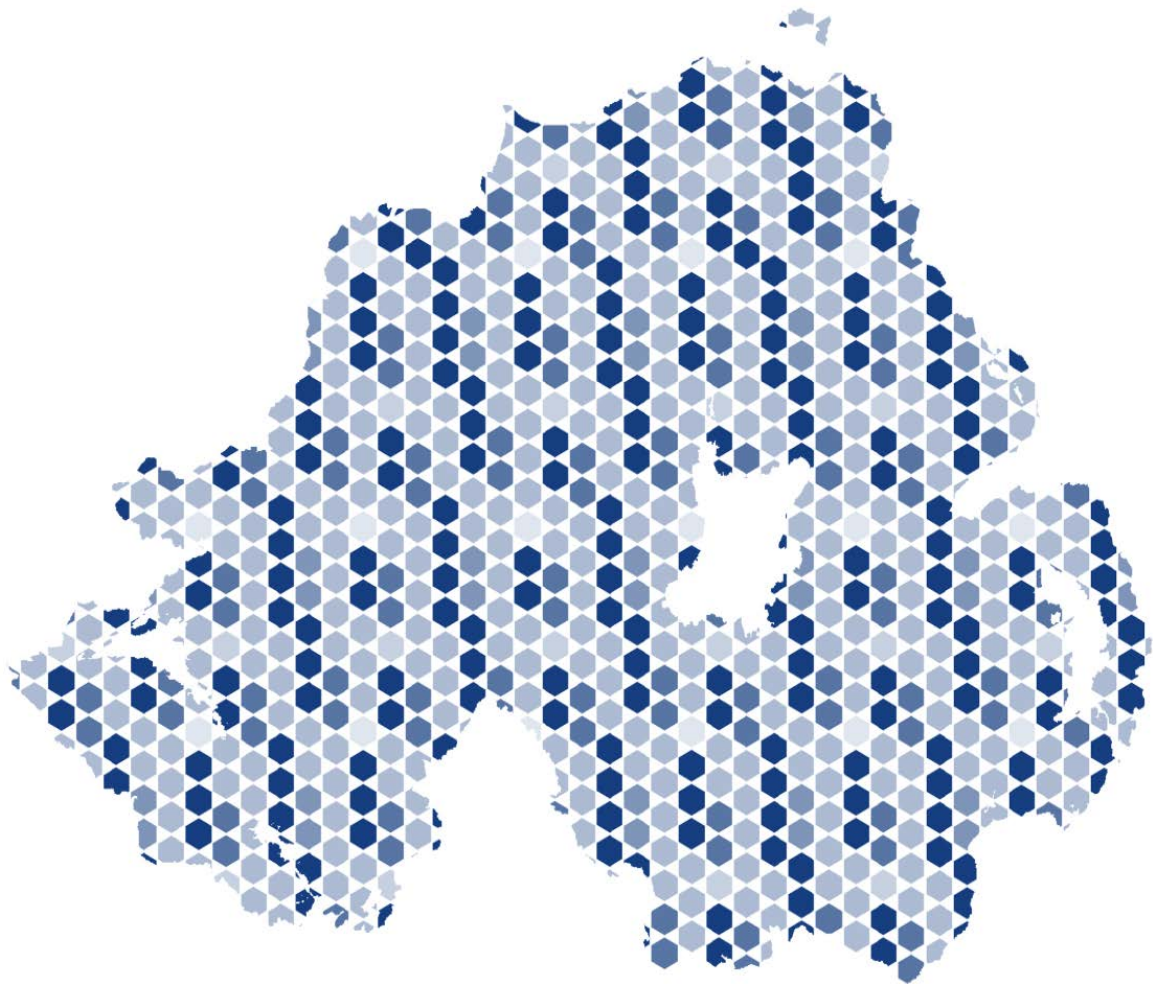


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Strathearn School, Belfast

All-girls' voluntary grammar 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection (Involving
Action Short of Strike) in
November 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
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INTRODUCTION

1. Context

Strathearn School is an all-girls' voluntary grammar school located in the Belmont area of East Belfast. The school is oversubscribed consistently at entry to year 8. It draws its pupils from a wide catchment area across East and South Belfast, North Down and the Ards peninsula. Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is consistently low. The construction of the new school building was completed in 2014. A new principal took up post in January 2017 and the senior leadership team was re-structured recently and includes two additional members.

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 almost none of the teaching staff would 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 inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

Strathearn School	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Year 8 Intake	111	117	110
Enrolment	781	783	772
% Attendance (NI Average)	96.7% (95.6%)	96.8% (93.5)	96.2% (N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	2.9%	5.4%	5.4%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	14.0% (109)	13.4% (105)	13.1% (101)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	6	13	11
No. of newcomers	*	*	*

* Fewer than five pupils

In addition to the focus on English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, there was a supplementary subject focus on physical education in this inspection.

2. Views of parents and staff

Eight percent of parents (51) and 21% of staff (26) responded to the online questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated that their children enjoyed learning at school, that they were making good progress in their learning and that the school was well thought of in the community. The written comments affirmed, in particular, the welcoming and positive ethos of the school, the extra-curricular activities provided for the pupils and the leadership of the school. The responses to the staff questionnaires were also positive, highlighting the school's high expectations for learning and teaching, the good opportunities for staff development and the sense of pride experienced by staff working in the school. A small number of issues raised in the parental questionnaires were discussed with the principal and governors, whilst maintaining the anonymity of the respondents.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of a post-primary inspection is to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the pupils;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

As a result of the industrial action by the teachers, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the quality of the provision and the overall outcomes for the pupils;
- the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards;
- the quality of the provision in English, mathematics and physical education; and
- the quality of the provision for the care, welfare and support of the pupils.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Unable to assure the quality of education
Outcomes for learners	No performance level available
Quality of Provision	No performance level available
Leadership and management	No performance level available

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

- Most of the pupils who met with inspectors were confident, articulate and highly motivated. The pupils gain leadership skills through taking on roles and responsibilities across the key stages, including senior office bearers and peer mentoring roles.
- The members of the school council participate meaningfully in making decisions about aspects of the provision which affect them directly, through engaging with senior leadership and the governors.
- The pupils have achieved success in a variety of sports at provincial, national and international level.
- Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining seven or more GSCE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average for selective schools in the same free school meals band. Pupils entitled to free schools meals and those who have additional needs with aspects of their learning attain in line with their peers. Notably, most of the pupils achieve seven or more GSCE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to B, including English and mathematics, which compares very favourably with other selective schools where the intake is of similar ability.

- The outcomes attained by the pupils in most of the individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to B are above the corresponding NI subject averages. A particular strength of the work of the school is the high proportion of pupils who attain grades A* to A at GCSE level.
- The proportion of pupils attaining English and mathematics, and two or more science subjects, has increased from 45% to 75% over the past three years.
- Over the past three years, most of the year 14 pupils attain three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A* to C, and the outcomes are either in line with, or notably above, the NI average for selective schools. Over the same period, most of the individual subjects are above or well above their corresponding NI subject averages.
- In the past three years the school regularly has pupils whose outcomes are acknowledged by the examining boards as representing their top achievers in a range of subjects at GCSE and A level.
- Most of the pupils in year 12 return to the school for post-16 study. A particular strength of the post-16 provision is the retention rate between year 13 and year 14; almost all of the pupils are supported to complete their two-year GCE A level courses in the school. The proportion of pupils who progress to higher education courses is significantly higher than the NI average for selective schools.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the standards attained by the pupils in English, mathematics and physical education;
- the progression made by the pupils in their learning; and
- the pupils' wider skills and dispositions.

6. Quality of Provision

- Across all key stages, the pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which is enhanced by a very wide range of extra-curricular sporting, musical and other opportunities, in which almost all of the pupils participate. The curricular offer at key stage (KS) 4 and post-16 is reviewed annually, is adaptive and, as a result, is matched very closely to the individual needs, interests and aspirations of the pupils. At post-16, the pupils have access to an increasingly broad range of level 3 subject choices, including those available through the East Belfast area learning community. The curricular provision at all levels is being developed further in response to extensive consultation with the pupils, an analysis of labour market information and the school's commitment to broadening the range of courses available to meet the needs and aspirations of all of the pupils.

- The co-ordination of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is highly effective. A number of pupils from all year groups met with members of the inspection team and they reported that they benefit from, and value greatly: their varied work experience opportunities; the bespoke advice provided by careers specialists; and, the well-resourced careers suite. The taught programme is complemented very well by an extensive range of careers events, preparation for interviews and support for applications, all of which develop well the pupils' knowledge and understanding of their options and the skills they need for their chosen career pathways.
- The pupils spoke positively about their school and expressed their appreciation of the approachable, helpful teachers and learning support staff.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the impact of the curriculum review on the pupils' learning;
- the effectiveness of the guidance and support (including CEIAG) in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences;
- the effectiveness and impact of planning, teaching and assessment in promoting learning;
- the quality of provision in English, literacy, mathematics and numeracy and physical education across the school; and
- the impact of care and welfare on teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leaders have reviewed appropriately the processes for school development planning, resulting in meaningful consultation with parents, staff and governors and the introduction of a new three-year school development plan. This plan is underpinned by the school's revised motto of 'Encourage, Empower and Excel' and is focused on: improving the learning, curricular and pastoral experiences for the pupils; and, the professional development of the staff, linked closely to current educational research.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) have clear roles and responsibilities which are aligned closely with the priorities in the school development plan. The SLT have identified appropriate priorities to guide school improvement, most notably the need to co-ordinate literacy and numeracy more strategically across the curriculum. It will be important to involve all staff in implementing, monitoring and evaluating this initiative.
- The positive, collegial ethos within the SLT enables the senior leaders to use their complementary strengths effectively to further the school improvement agenda. While a consistent format for action planning for improvement has been established, the evaluations are not sufficiently informed by quantitative and qualitative data to assess accurately the impact of the planned actions and to measure robustly the progress made against targets.

- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors played an integral role in the creation of the new school development plan and have identified sustainability in standards and quality of educational experiences as an additional area for improvement. Through the well-established committee structure, they monitor robustly the progress made against set targets and the associated financial implications. The governors are well-informed about the life and work of the school, including the standards achieved by the pupils. Consequently, they provide appropriate levels of support and challenge.

8. Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. The school has identified the need, appropriately, to update the positive behaviour management and staff code of conduct policies.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the effectiveness and impact of senior leadership;
- the effectiveness and impact of middle leadership; and
- the effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement

CONCLUSION

9. Overall effectiveness

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.

Health and Safety/Accommodation

- It will be important for the school to conduct a risk assessment of access points to the school in order to enhance security and minimise any potential risks to pupil or staff safety, especially during lunchtimes.

Examination performance and other statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2014-15 to 2016-17 completed

Based on data held by the school in SIMS² and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Strathearn School achieving seven or more GCSE's (A* to B and A* to C) and equivalent subjects, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band³.

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects</i>	99	98.3	100
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</i>	96.49%	97.41%	96.43%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁴</i>	96.8%	96.4%	N/A
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	96.49%	97.41%	94.64%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	96.5 %	96%	N/A
<i>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades B or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	82.46%	73.28%	83.93%
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	99.12%	100.00%	100.00%
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	100%	100%	67%

² SIMS: School Information Management System

³ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

⁴ The benchmarking bands for 2015/16, as set in in Circular 2017/8 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting' are different to those used in preceding years; therefore, trend comparisons with previous years' benchmarking data need to be treated with caution.

GCE A level examination results at grades A* to C from 2014-15 to 2016-17 completed

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Strathearn School achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	92.2	96	92.5
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	76.5%	85%	79.3%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>76.8%</i>	<i>77.7%</i>	N/A

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level (over the past three years) Grades A* - B completed

	2015	2016	2017
Number of pupils in Year 12 cohort	113	116	112

GCSE Subject	Number of Entries	School A* - B %	NI A* - B %
English Language (GCSE/FC_5030)	342	98.8	89
English Literature (GCSE/FC_5110)	342	93.9	89
Mathematics (GCSE/FC_2210)	342	86.8	78
Biology (GCSE/FC_1010)	178	79.2	85
History (GCSE/FC_4010)	173	87.3	82
Geography (GCSE/FC_3910)	162	92.6	84
French (GCSE/FC_5650)	162	83.3	74
Religious Studies (GCSE/FC_4610)	160	89.4	87
Spanish (GCSE/FC_5750)	145	91.7	81
Mathematics Further (GCSE/FC_2330)	131	93.9	88
Physics (GCSE/FC_1210)	122	88.5	88
Science Double Award (GCSE/DA_1370)	89	94.9	78
Chemistry (GCSE/FC_1110)	84	86.9	86
Art & Design (GCSE/FC_3510)]	74	87.8	84
Business Studies (GCSE/FC_3210)	70	75.7	78
Drama (GCSE/FC_5210)	66	68.2	85
Information Technology (GCSE/FC_2650)	63	93.7	92
German (GCSE/FC_5670)	51	76.5	73
Home Economics (GCSE/FC_3310)	40	97.5	88
Design and Technology (GCSE/FC_8900)	39	74.4	88
Music (GCSE/FC_7010)	34	91.2	90
Sport/PE Studies (GCSE/FC_7210)	31	64.5	83
Chinese (GCSE/FC_5950)	**	100	N/A

* indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

** indicates fewer than 5 entries over 3 years

**Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level (over the past three years)
Grades A* - C**

GCE Subject	Number of Entries	School A* - C %	NI A* - C %
Mathematics (GCE/A_2210)	119	95.00%	90.80%
English Literature (GCE/A_5110)	96	97.90%	85.80%
Biology (GCE/A_1010)	77	87.00%	83.80%
Religious Studies (GCE/A_4610)	76	97.40%	90.10%
Geography (GCE/A_3910)	75	96.00%	90.00%
Chemistry (GCE/A_1110)	62	85.50%	86.00%
Media Film and TV Studies (GCE/A_5350)	60	98.30%	89.20%
History (GCE/A_4010)	52	98.10%	88.60%
Business Studies (GCE/A_3210)	46	89.10%	88.30%
Physics (GCE/A_1210)	44	93.20%	88.70%
Drama (GCE/A_5210)	43	100.00%	90.40%
French (GCE/A_5650)	31	100.00%	88.40%
Information Technology (GCE/A_2650)	25	80.00%	84.50%
Spanish (GCE/A_5750)	23	91.30%	93.20%
Art & Design (GCE/A_3510)	20	100.00%	93.00%
Mathematics Further (GCE/A_2330)*			
	19	96.30%	N/A
Home Economics (GCE/A_3310)*			
	16	87.50%	91.80%
Politics (GCE/A_4830)*			
	11	100.00%	89.20%
Design and Technology (GCE/A_8900)*			
	11	90.90%	92.90%
Music (GCE/A_7010)*			
	9	100.00%	84.80%
Psychology (GCE/A_4850)*			
	9	66.70%	72.00%
German (GCE/A_5670)*			
	8	100.00%	N/A
Health & Social Care (GCE/A_0003)**			
	5	100.00%	85.50%
D&T Product Design (GCE/A_9080)**			
	**	100.00%	73.90%

* indicates fewer than 20 entries over 3 years

** indicates fewer than 5 entries over 3 years

Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at Strathearn School, from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools from school census returns to the Department of Education for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Year 12 staying on to Year 13	86.3	93.5
% Year 13 staying on to Year 14	87.2	95.5

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from Strathearn School who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for selective schools.

	School	NI	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	114	9750			
Employment	(1.8%)	509 (5.2%)			
Further Education	14.9%	2083 (21.4%)	0	13	4
Higher Education	81.6%	6706 (68.8%)	0	0	93
Work-based Learning (Training)	1.8%	221 (2.3%)			
Unemployed	0%	95 (1.0%)			
Unknown	0%	136 (1.4%)			

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication, which is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ISEF-Post-Primary>.

Inspectors scrutinised documentation, data and held formal discussions with some pupils (in groups), and some staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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