

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Strabane Academy, Strabane, County Tyrone

DE Ref No 241-0311

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in May 2024



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Department of Education
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Follow-up to the inspection of Strabane Academy, Strabane, BT82 8LD (241-0311)

Introduction

Strabane Academy is an 11-18 co-educational controlled grammar post-primary school in Strabane. The school's vision is one of a "caring, supportive, close-knit community committed to providing an outstanding education that motivates and inspires all to reach their true potential in an atmosphere of mutual respect".

This follow-up inspection was carried out in May 2024 and provided the school with the opportunity to demonstrate its progress in addressing the areas for action from the time of the last inspection in February 2023.

From the time of the last inspection, a head of junior school and a head of senior school have been appointed to support the work of the heads of year and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of strategic priorities. A temporary senior leader has also been appointed to lead and support staff professional learning in the school.

Views of parents, staff and pupils

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to pupils, parents and staff in advance of the follow-up inspection.

Twelve percent (80) of pupils responded to the questionnaire across all key stages, with almost one-quarter of those pupils who responded providing additional written responses. Most of the pupils indicated that they are encouraged to set their own learning targets, with most also reporting that their achievements are recognised and celebrated. In the written responses, a small number highlighted that they have not had an opportunity to participate in shared education.

Nine percent (46) of parents responded to the online questionnaire, with a significant minority providing written comments. Most of the parents who responded report their child is making good progress in their learning, and most are content with the quality of the teaching and support in the school.

Just over two-thirds (67%) of the staff responded to the confidential online questionnaire, with most reporting that they have benefitted from staff professional learning (SPL) opportunities.

Issues raised in the pupil, parent and staff questionnaires were shared with the principal and chair of governors.

Inspectors also met and spoke with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 11,13 and 14.

Key actions

The key actions which affect the work of the school are set out below.

- The school has received external support provided by the Education Authority (EA) in relation to action planning and the development of the role of the middle leader.
- A wide range of qualitative and quantitative information is used by the staff to identify pupils who require targeted support with their learning.
- The development of the *Strabane Academy Lesson Formula* provides a structure for consistent learning experiences across the school, including “retrieval strategies” which are used to enhance pupil learning alongside the delivery of revision workshops to provide pupils with appropriate study techniques.
- A whole school focus on increasing pupil attendance by implementing consistently a range of strategies.
- The recent establishment of leadership forums comprised of two members of senior leadership and five heads of department in each forum.

Key findings

- During discussions with inspectors the pupils report that they enjoy learning in lessons where there are opportunities to engage in practical tasks, share ideas and work with others. The pupils expressed that they would benefit from further opportunities to research and explore career pathways. In addition, the pupils in year 13 and year 14 reported that access to increased enrichment programmes, such as financial education and relationships and sexuality education, would prepare them better for life after school.
- The leadership is committed to the ongoing review of the curriculum offer to ensure appropriate pathways can be accessed by all pupils at key stage (KS) 4 and post-16. The views of pupils are informing the provision for careers education, information, advice, and guidance (CEIAG) across the school, but this work is at an early stage of development.
- Schemes of learning at KS 3 have been reviewed and the planning in a number of departments, particularly in English and mathematics, is being tailored effectively to the learning needs of the pupils. A growing culture of high expectations across departments is providing progressive and challenging learning experiences. A whole school dissemination of departmental planning is being undertaken to help support the provision of consistently high quality learning experiences across the school.

- Almost all of the lessons observed were effective. There is a positive and supportive atmosphere for learning, with almost all of the pupils being motivated and engaged in the lessons. The teachers use effectively strategies such as: thinking time to enable pupils to develop their responses; opportunities for pupils to skim, scan and summarise their work; and lesson starters which consolidate prior learning.
- A staff termly learning and teaching newsletter includes contemporary research on what constitutes effective classroom practice and includes rich feedback from pupils on learning and teaching across the school. For this work to have greater impact, the staff should communicate to pupils the changes that are being implemented in response to their views and experiences.
- The teachers use well a wide range of information at whole school and departmental level to identify pupils for targeted support. This focus on whole school reflective practice and improvement is impacting positively on pupil outcomes. The effective monitoring of key stage 3 assessments across departments has also resulted in improved target setting practices across most subjects. The school has appropriately identified the need to increase the number of pupils attaining GCSE qualifications at grades A* to B and to raise further the attainment for the pupils at A-level.
- Almost one-half of the heads of department have taken up post since 2018. The leadership forums set up in the school provide an opportunity for middle leaders to review their own practice and develop further their skills within a supportive community of learning. Staff professional learning for heads of department is supporting them well in their role. The programme for SPL has focused on: writing effective action plans; meaningful target setting; leadership styles and behaviours, effective monitoring and evaluating practices; and the use of CCEA analytics and examiner reports to inform learning and teaching.
- Whole school SPL is underpinned by educational research, provides staff with strategies to improve their teaching and is impacting positively on pupil learning. A particularly effective feature of the work is the opportunity for staff to choose professional learning which is aligned to their individual developmental needs.

Child Protection

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. The school is aware of changes in arrangements for adult protection and this is reflected in the child protection and safeguarding policy.

Going Forward

The staff in Strabane Academy work collegially to support pupils and improve their learning experiences. The improved structures for monitoring and evaluating pupil progress, informed by pupil and staff views, is resulting in better outcomes for the pupils. The ETI will continue to monitor, through the District Inspector, the progress of Strabane Academy in addressing the areas for action which have been identified appropriately by the school leadership, namely:

- to continue the ongoing review of the curriculum, particularly at post-16 to improve the pupil outcomes attained; and
- to review and develop further the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance across the school.

No further follow-up inspection is required.

Appendix 1: 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%

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