

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

The High School, Ballynahinch, County Down

DE Ref No 421-0029

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in June 2024



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Follow-up to the inspection of The High School, Ballynahinch, BT24 8EH (421-0029)

Introduction

The High School, Ballynahinch is an 11-16 co-educational non-selective school; its enrolment has increased significantly over the past six years, from 177 pupils in 2018 to 415 currently. The principal was appointed in late 2023, having held the acting post since March, 2018. The school has developed its vision and values resulting in 'The HSB Way', a commitment to enabling every pupil to achieve their potential; the revised vision and values are currently being implemented across the school.

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

Views of pupils, parents and staff

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

Across the key stages (KS) around 50 percent of pupils (210) responded to the questionnaire, with 30 pupils providing additional written comments. The responses were generally positive, with the pupils acknowledging the support and care provided to them by the teachers and other staff.

Inspectors met with pupils from years 8 to 11 in two focus groups. The pupils who spoke with the inspectors were polite and thoughtful in their contributions to the discussions. They recognised elements of the school vision such as: high expectations for good attendance and its importance for success; and, how they feel respected and encouraged to achieve their full potential. The pupils from KS 3 talked about their positive experiences of school life, such as learning through practical and purposeful activities. The year 11 pupils understand well how their learning is linked to their aspirations and potential career pathways.

The pupils reported that they all feel safe and know who to speak to if they have any concerns about their wellbeing.

Just over 20 percent of parents/carers (74) responded to the questionnaire and most of these responses were positive. The parents expressed high levels of support for the work of the school and most reported that their child is happy with their school experiences.

All the teachers (35), classroom assistants (25) and support staff (7) responded to the questionnaires, expressing high levels of satisfaction in their work and roles within the school.

Any issues raised in the questionnaires including the written responses were shared with the principal and governors.

Key actions

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

- The school has received support from the Education Authority in relation to school improvement; this support is valued highly by the staff and the governors.
- The school has prioritised developing the capacity of the governors, senior leadership team and the middle leaders through in-house and externally facilitated professional learning.
- The board of governors has been reconstituted with a new Chair, Vice-Chair and sub-committees; the governors are providing stability and oversight of the work of the school.
- Teams to drive school improvement have been established; quantitative and qualitative data is being used to identify pupils who need additional support.
- The school's budget deficit is reducing.
- Provision has been established to support pupils from Ukraine.

Key findings

- The senior leadership team (SLT) and the governors have given high priority to the school improvement work and have amended appropriately their objectives and actions to reflect their knowledge of the pupils, their strengths and needs. Consequently, good progress has been made in improving the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.
- The governors are well-informed about the work and life of the school. The school leaders at all levels meet regularly with the governors, who support and challenge, as appropriate. The SLT and middle leaders have a better understanding of self-evaluation and are leading well the improvement work in their respective areas of responsibility.
- A key focus of the school development work has been the building of working relationships at all levels, including with the parents and wider community. Working relationships at all levels within the school are very positive and the staff are committed and child centred.

- Creative approaches, such as the bespoke programme for individual pupils have led to improvements in overall pupil attendance (from 81% in 2022/23 to 86.5% in the current year to date); this work needs to continue to improve further the attendance of the pupils.
- The provision for the pupils from Ukraine is supporting well their learning and development of skills.
- A whole school approach has improved the quality of provision across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics. There is now a consistent approach to classroom practice with clear expectations and increased readiness to learn. The school has identified appropriately the need to continue to work on classroom pedagogy, including through observation of lessons and the sharing of effective practice.
- A range of interventions for literacy and numeracy are having a positive impact on outcomes; these include an extra period of English and mathematics and reading time during registration for all pupils, and withdrawal sessions for those who require one-to-one support.
- All (12) lessons observed during the inspection were effective in promoting learning. Key features of the lessons included: scaffolding to meet the needs of individual learners; pupils engaged in purposeful activities with paired, grouped and individual tasks; and effective plenaries.
- The outcomes for pupils attaining five GCSE qualifications (or equivalent) including English and mathematics at grades A* to C have improved significantly. The school's internal data shows that almost all the pupils achieve in line with or above their ability and predicted outcomes. Importantly, attainment in GCSE English language and mathematics has improved steadily over the past three years.

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.

Going Forward

The High School, Ballynahinch has made good progress in addressing the areas for action. The improvement work has had a positive impact on the provision and outcomes for the pupils, leadership including governance and has brought clarity to the school's vision and values. The ETI, through engagement of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the areas for consideration in this report.

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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