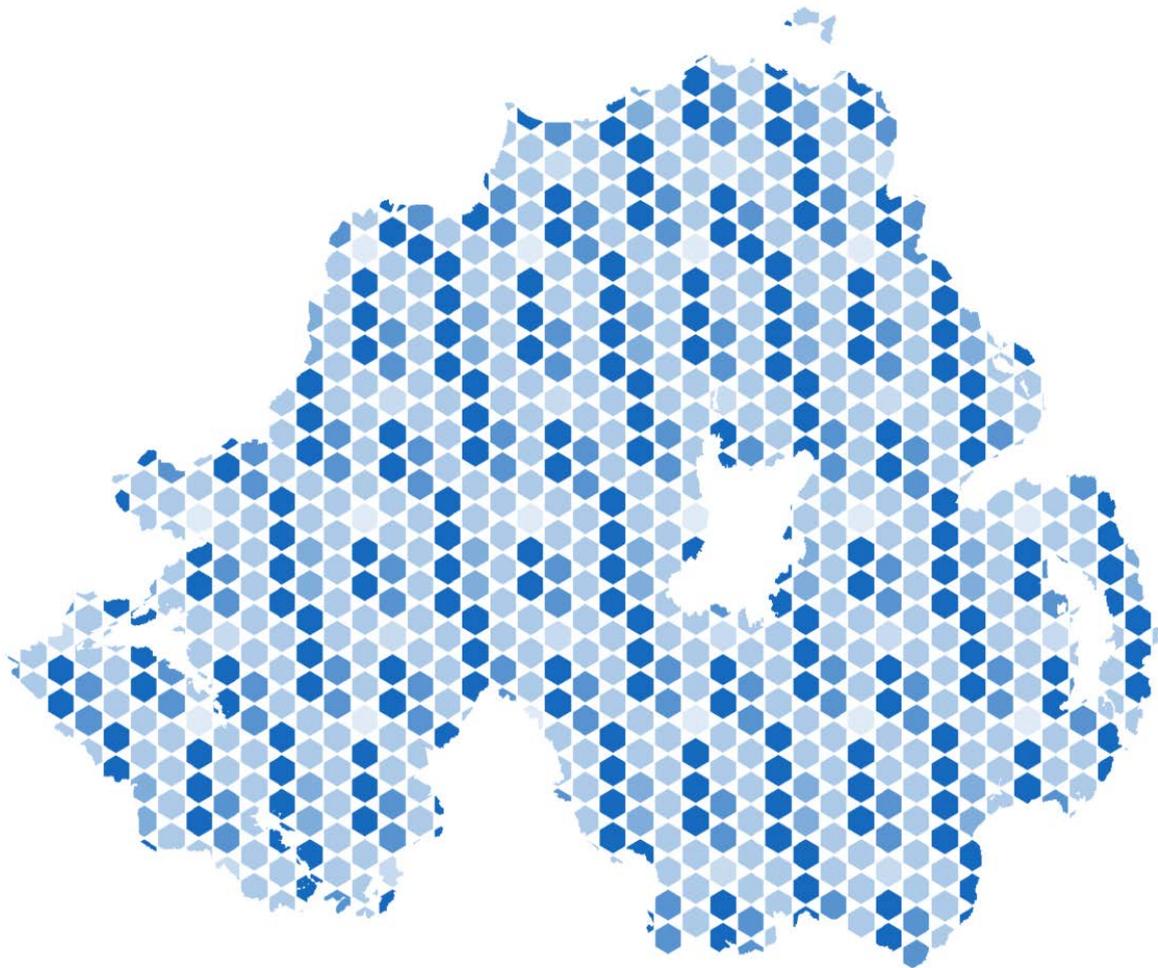


SPECIAL SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Rathore School, Newry,
County Down

Report of an Inspection in
November 2015



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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 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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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of special schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-special-education.htm>

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation and the pupil's written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupil's, teachers and 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.

Fewer than five parents responded to the questionnaire and their responses were positive. The parents value the caring, supportive ethos throughout the school and appreciate the staff's input to the education and welfare of their children. Eighteen percent of staff responded to the questionnaires. The majority of responses were positive about aspects of school life and work, and a number of concerns were discussed (maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents) with governors and senior leaders.

2. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

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

3. Context

Rathore School provides education for 177 pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged from three to nineteen years; it is situated on the outskirts of Newry and the pupils travel to the school from a wide geographical area. There has been a steady increase in pupil enrolment over the last four years, and a substantial classroom extension programme is due to be completed by March 2016. The school currently has an acting-principal who has been in post for 11 months, and an acting vice-principal who has been in post for four years. At the time of inspection it was reported that a permanent principal had been appointed.

Rathore school	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment school	138	153	164	177
% Attendance	90.7	91.7	89.3	85.5
FSME Percentage ¹	37.7	37.9	45.7	45
Newcomers	6	7	7	9

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Achievements and outcomes	Requires significant improvement
Provision for learning	Important areas for improvement
Leadership and management	Requires urgent improvement

5. Achievements and outcomes

- The majority of the pupils settle well into the supportive school environment. They enjoy school activities and participate in a variety of extended learning opportunities.
- In a minority of lessons observed, the pupils work co-operatively with one another in pairs and groups demonstrating well their skills in communication, team-work and self-reliance. There is a need to increase the availability of such opportunities, incorporating them into learning activities as appropriate. The majority of pupils in the early years and the post-sixteen classes are developing appropriate skills through active learning experiences. The achievements and progression of the pupils are not tracked to reliably inform the planning for each pupil. There is a need for the school to formalise the tracking of progress, as pupils move across the key stages, to ensure that they reach their full potential.
- A majority of the pupils in classes providing additional support for aspects of their behaviour make good progress and are able to work well for increasingly sustained periods of time.
- The post-sixteen pupils develop social and life skills, to prepare them for transition to suitable placements on leaving the school, such as through a Young Enterprise programme to develop life skills in marketing, finance and project management. The senior pupils achieve from a range of appropriate accredited courses provided by the school, including The Princes Trust xl programme, and through the Southern Regional College, City and Guilds entry level 1 in Food Studies, entry level 2 in Health, Safety and Hygiene and ASDAN² entry level 1 in Personal Progress.
- Pupil's achievements are celebrated by the school, both in class and in assemblies.

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

² Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network

6. Provision for learning

- The majority of the learning and teaching observed was good or better. In the most effective practice, well-planned and resourced lessons are skilfully presented in a stimulating learning environment. Activities are relevant, engaging and practical with the learning supported well by classroom assistants. In the less effective practice, the pace was slow, learning activities were insufficiently differentiated and there were limited opportunities to consolidate learning.
- In a minority of lessons there was a lack of effective strategies to support children with challenging behaviour which impacted on the ability of other children in the classroom to engage in the learning activities.
- The current planning system is not appropriately matched to the needs of all the pupils and does not sufficiently guide teachers. There is a need for an agreed planning system which takes account of pupil's needs, with appropriate, challenging and progressive learning programmes and clear intended learning outcomes.
- The recently introduced assessment system to inform learning within the school is not effective. Whilst some teachers have revised the assessments implemented in their classrooms in order to meet the needs of their pupils, there is a need for all staff to discuss and agree a clear assessment system to inform planning for learning throughout the school, and to assess the progression and attainments of the pupils.
- In the best practice in literacy, the pupils benefit from well-planned paired and group work, to support their progress in writing, talking and listening, and reading skills. There has been an appropriate recent focus on developing a range of reading materials throughout the school. Class teachers monitor pupil's achievements and outcomes by tracking their progress against their literacy target on each individual education plan (IEP); this information is not however used to inform planning for the school overall. In numeracy, there is a lack of opportunities for the pupils to develop their mathematical knowledge and skills, particularly through practical activities and play. For literacy and numeracy there is an over-reliance on worksheet activities across the curriculum leading to pupil disengagement.
- The post-sixteen pupils are aware of career pathways, including further education, training and employment and have opportunities which are linked to their interests and abilities for appropriate work experience, both in school and in local businesses. There is good use made of external support agencies to enhance the learning opportunities, particularly to support the pupils while on work experience.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to enhance pupil's learning experiences in some classes. The school has identified appropriately the need to plan strategically for the development of pupil's competence in their use of ICT.

- The staff are very committed to the welfare of the pupils and to developing their confidence and self esteem. The parents value the effective communication from the school. The school makes good use of relevant agencies to contribute to the holistic development of the pupils. In discussions with the inspection team the pupils spoke enthusiastically about the subjects they enjoy in school, and about the positive impact of the relationships with the staff and their peers. They spoke about the progress they make towards independence through relevant curricular opportunities including operating the school cafe, and their contribution to the school on a daily basis. This is appropriately recognised through the Millennium Volunteer Award.
- While the pupils make good use of the local swimming facilities and a local school for football and walking, the school has identified the need to provide more opportunities for regular and frequent physical activity, and consistently promote healthy eating to encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership team does not currently provide strategic direction which takes account of the needs of the children, parents, staff and the wider community. There is a need to provide effective strategic leadership, including the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching to inform the school's development planning process and to bring about better educational outcomes for the pupils.
- Co-ordinators do not have clear agreement on, nor understanding of their roles of responsibility, and are not enabled to lead and to take appropriate action where required. There is a need to agree and establish clear roles and responsibilities for co-ordinators and to enable them to provide effective leadership in their areas of expertise.
- Where pupils experiencing difficulties with their behaviour are placed in the mainstream classes, their progress is variable, and for a minority of pupils, is in urgent need of the management's attention. There is a need to consider the composition of classes and to enable and empower the members of staff with relevant expertise and experience to manage the provision effectively and to give advice and support throughout the school.
- The present school development plan does not meet the requirements of the Department of Education. There is insufficient evidence of consultation and of the monitoring and evaluation of targets of the associated action plans; consequently the school cannot assess accurately the impact of its past work nor demonstrate the capacity to effect and sustain improvement.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of the governance evaluated. The newly constituted board of governors is establishing effective working relationships with the school. They are developing their challenge function regarding the leadership and management of the school and the quality of provision for the pupils.

- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspection team, pupils stated that they feel safe and well-cared for in school and are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety or well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

Rathore School needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the need:

- to provide effective strategic leadership, including the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching to inform the school's development planning process and to bring about better educational outcomes for the pupils;
- for all staff to discuss and agree a clear assessment system to inform planning for learning throughout the school, and to assess the progression and attainments of the pupils; and
- to agree and establish clear roles and responsibilities for co-ordinators and to enable them to provide effective leadership in their areas of expertise.

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 in 18 to 24 months.

Health and Safety

1. There is water ingress through the roof of the hall onto a wooden floor below. This makes the floor slippery and unsafe for those using the hall.

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