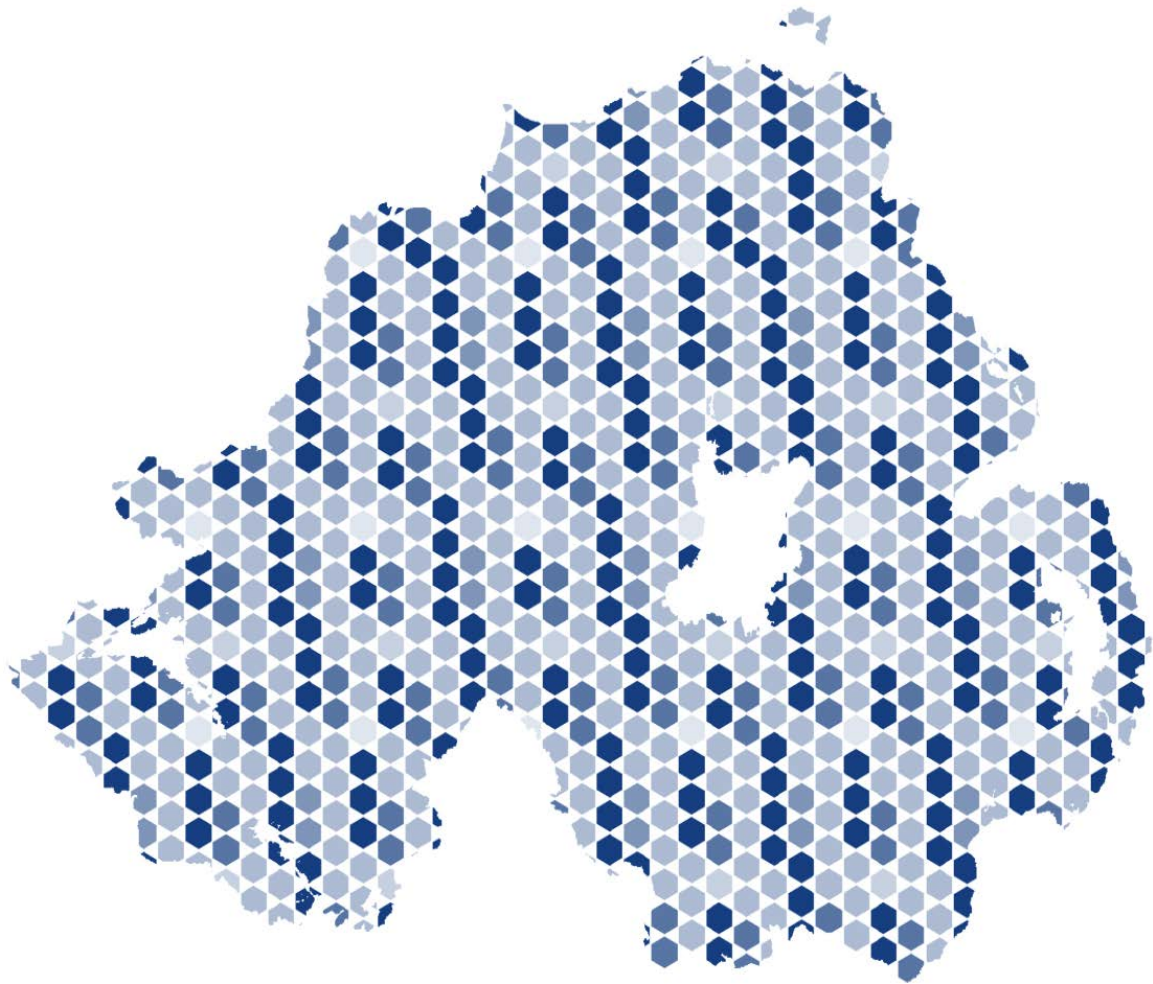


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballymena Academy, Ballymena,
County Antrim

Co-educational voluntary 11-18 grammar school

Report of an Inspection (Involving
Action Short of Strike) in
April 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



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INTRODUCTION

1. Context

Ballymena Academy is a co-educational voluntary grammar school located in the heart of Ballymena. The school attracts pupils from a wide catchment area which encompasses the town and the surrounding rural areas; it is over-subscribed regularly at entry to year 8. Over the last four years, while remaining low, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of the pupils entitled to free school meals and in the percentage of the pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning.

A high priority is given to the school's co-curricular strategy; most of the pupils take part in the sporting, cultural, social and academic activities provided outside timetabled lessons. A particular strength of this strategy is the well-conceived programme for physical recreation, through which the vision 'everyone choosing regular participation in physical activity to support learning and lifelong well-being' is being realised. In 2017, the school received a national award for Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG). Key members of staff are participating in the key stage (KS) 2/3 transition project with two local primary schools. The school participates in the Ballymena Learning Together area learning community, with representation on the steering group and all of its sub-committees.

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 all 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 inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

Ballymena Academy	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Year 8 Intake	176	177	178	175
Enrolment	1238	1225	1215	1205
% Attendance (NI Average)	96.3% (95.6%)	96.6% (95.6%)	96.4% (N/A)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	4.9	5.9	5.9	7.3
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	2.5 % (31)	2.4 % (30)	5.1% (62)	5.7% (69)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need in the mainstream school	*	*	6	5
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

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

2. Views of parents and staff

A small number of parents (37) and staff (9) responded to the online questionnaire. Most of the responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In the written comments, the parents emphasised the encouragement and assistance given by the staff to support their children's learning. The very small number of written staff responses noted the relevance of the professional development opportunities, supportive leadership and management and the school's inclusive ethos. The individual concerns which were raised through the questionnaires were discussed with the principal and the representatives from the board of governors.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest 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.

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

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 provision in English, mathematics and science;
- the quality and impact of planning, teaching and learning on promoting successful learning; and,
- the quality and impact of the provision for care, welfare and support of the pupils.

Where it has been possible to evaluate aspects of the foci, they have been reported in the body of the report.

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

- The pupils who met with inspectors were mature, confident, articulate and highly motivated. They develop wider skills and dispositions through, for example, their training for digital leadership and peer mentoring roles. As they progress through the school, the pupils gain leadership skills through taking on roles and responsibilities, including as office-bearers on committees. The pupils have achieved success in a variety of sports at provincial, national and international level.
- Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been consistently in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools.
- It is notable that just over three-quarters of the pupils achieve seven or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to B, including English and mathematics. A particular strength is the very high attainment of the girls, with 86% attaining at this level. Over the same period, 65% of the boys attained at the same level. The school has identified appropriately, as a priority, raising further the achievement of the boys and is addressing it through the ongoing review of the curriculum and an appropriate staff development programme.
- The attainment at GCSE of the small numbers of pupils entitled to free school meals is consistent with that of their peers. Most of the pupils who have additional needs with aspects of their learning secured seven or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
- The GCSE outcomes attained by the pupils in almost all of the individual subjects at grades A* to B are in line with, or above, the corresponding NI subject averages. Of particular note, the pupils' attainment in almost one-half of the individual subjects is more than ten percentage points above the equivalent average.
- 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 almost all of the outcomes are either in line with, or above, the NI average for similar schools. The performance in one-third of the individual subjects is more than ten percentage points higher than the corresponding average.
- The school, over the last three years, has pupils who are recognised by the examining boards as the top achievers in a wide range of subjects at GCSE and A level. In addition, a small number of the pupils have been successful in securing scholarships to higher education.
- The staying-on rates from year 12 to 13, and from year 13 to 14, as well as the progression to further and higher education, are all above the NI average for selective schools.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

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

6. Quality of provision

- The pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum at all key stages which enables them to progress appropriately, as evidenced by the high standards attained in public examinations and the progression pathways secured. The curriculum is also enhanced by an extensive co-curricular programme which actively engages around four-fifths of the pupils.
- The curriculum at KS 3, KS 4 and post-16 is reviewed annually and is informed by a wide range of performance data and an analysis of labour market information. The school is committed to widening further the range of courses available to meet the needs and career aspirations of all of the pupils.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke positively about their varied work experience opportunities, the personalised advice provided by careers specialists, and the opportunities to benefit from a broad range of careers events. The pupils value the community spirit which is nurtured through the co-curricular clubs and activities.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

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

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leadership team articulates a clear, strategic vision for improvement in: learning and teaching; care, welfare and support within the school community; and, the standards attained by the pupils. The senior leaders have complementary strengths and work collegially to monitor, evaluate and review the quality of school provision.

- The school development plan sets out clearly the strengths in the provision and identifies appropriate areas for further development. It is informed by ongoing consultation with the whole school community, analysis of performance data and regular monitoring and evaluation of the actions to promote improvement. The staff development programme is linked closely to the whole-school priorities. However, there is variation in the quality of action-planning. The action plans would benefit further from a sharper focus on the use of baseline data to set more measurable targets.
- The governors are very well-informed about, and have a clear understanding of, the work and life of the school. They provide both support and challenge when appropriate; they need to develop further their knowledge of the quality of learning and teaching in the school. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.

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.

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.

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, and 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

1. A risk assessment has been conducted of the open access to the school site and accommodation. The outcomes have been shared with the relevant authorities. This issue needs to be addressed urgently in the interest of pupil and staff well-being.
2. The toilets and the changing facilities require improvement.

Examination performance and other statistical data

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

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 Ballymena Academy achieving seven or more GCSE examinations and equivalent at grades A* to C and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band³.

The table also includes the percentage of year 12 pupils in Ballymena Academy achieving seven or more GCSE examinations and equivalent, including English and mathematics at grades A* to B. In this instance, there is no NI average available.

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>	100	99.4	100
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</i>	98.9	96.0	96.6
<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>	98.9	96.0	96.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	96.5	96.0	N/A
<i>Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades B or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	75.7	73.1	77.9
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	99.5	97.7	98.3
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	88.9	100

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

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 Ballymena Academy achieving three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A* to C, compared with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	98.8	97.6	99.4
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	83.5	78.7	83.7
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁵</i>	76.8	77.7	N/A

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.

⁵ 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.

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

(The three year average is expressed as a percentage of the pupils entered)

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Number of pupils in Year 12 cohort	181	175	176

GCSE Subject	Number of Entries	School A* to B %	NI A* to B %
Art & Design	75	76.00	80
Biology	154	95.40	81
Business Studies	114	76.30	71
Chemistry	152	90.10	84
Classical Civilisation	76	73.70	N/A
Construction	32	100.00	85
D&T Product Design	22	95.50	N/A
Design and Technology	47	83.00	75
Drama	28	75.00	79
Economics	30	80.00	76
English Language	533	85.00	81
English Literature	251	96.80	82
French	308	80.20	67
Geography	62	71.00	75
German	164	59.80	65
History	311	97.70	78
Home Economics	109	85.30	84
Information Technology	165	81.80	84
Mathematics	533	91.50	75
Mathematics Further	148	92.60	86
Media Studies	280	77.10	71
Music	57	92.90	87
Physics	151	98.00	83
Religious Studies	64	95.30	78
Science Double Award	347	84.90	72
Science Single Award	22	86.40	70
Spanish	115	81.70	71

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

(The three year average is expressed as a percentage of the pupils entered)

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Number of pupils in Year 14 cohort	166	164	170

GCE A Level Subject or equivalent	Number of entries	School A* to C %	NI A* to C %
Art & Design	32	97	92
Biology	228	90	83
BTEC Construction	38	100	N/A
Business Studies	21	86	88
Chemistry	91	93	86
Classical Civilisation	49	95	N/A
Design and Technology	13	69	N/A
Drama	8	100	90
Economics	29	90	85
English Literature	81	96	85
French	53	94	89
Geography	25	100	87
Health & Social Care	84	100	85
History	158	96	86
Home Economics	46	80	91
Information Technology	50	74	79
Mathematics	168	93	89
Media Film and TV Studies	78	92	85
Music	19	100	85
Physics	120	85	82
Religious Studies	48	100	89
Spanish	35	100	91
Sport/PE Studies	26	81	80
German ⁶	*	89	N/A
Mathematics Further	*	100	98
Software Systems Design ⁶	*	100	N/A

* Indicates fewer than 10 entries over 3 years

⁶ In 2 out of the last 3 years

Staying on rate⁷ 2016/17

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 school compared with the NI average for all schools and for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	86.3	89.3
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	87.2	94.3

Leavers' destinations 2015/16

Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from Ballymena Academy 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	192	9750			
Employment	2.1%	509 (5.2%)			
Institute of Further Education	22.4%	2083 (21.4%)	0	39	4
Institute of Higher Education	70.3%	6706 (68.8%)	0	0	135
Work-based Learning (Training)	2.6%	221 (2.3%)			
Unemployed	0%	95 (1%)			
Unknown	2.6%	136 (1.4%)			

⁷ The 'Staying On Rate' is taken to mean the pupils who stay on at the school from year 12 to year 13 or transfer from year 12 to year 13 in another school; and, then from year 13 to year 14.

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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