

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Lurgan Junior High School, Lurgan,
County Armagh

DE Ref No 521-0271

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in June 2024



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Department of Education
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Follow-up to the inspection of Lurgan Junior High School, Lurgan, BT66 8SU (521-0271)

Introduction

Lurgan Junior High School is a controlled, co-educational, 11-14, all-ability junior high school which operates within the 'two tier' schooling system of post-primary education known as the 'Dickson Plan', where pupils leave primary school and transfer to a junior high school for a three-year period. The school's vision for its pupils is to empower them to reach their potential and to feel respected, cared for and equal.

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 time of the last follow-up inspection in October 2022.

Since the last inspection, a Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) for social communication was established in the school.

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 follow-up inspection.

Twenty percent (149) of pupils responded to the questionnaire, 28 of whom provided additional written comments. Almost all (142) of the pupils stated that their teachers and other adults treat them with care and respect. Most of the pupils reported that their teachers and other adults help them when they find it difficult to learn and that their teachers give them helpful feedback on their work. In the written comments, the pupils expressed their appreciation of their supportive teachers and a small number indicated that they would like more opportunities to give their views about what helps them learn. Inspectors also met and spoke with pupils from years 8, 9

and 10 in three focus groups and during their classes. The pupils report that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

Almost 15 percent (97) of parents responded to the questionnaire. Almost all (89) of the parents know about the school's vision and aims. Most indicate that their child is happy at school, is making good progress in their learning and that they would recommend the school to others. A significant minority (35) of the parents responded that the staff do not ask for their views or take their views into account. Forty-two parents provided written comments, around one-third of whom highlighted the encouragement and support of the staff and their child's positive learning experience.

Forty-two (79%) of the teaching staff responded to the online questionnaire and all are clear about the school's vision. Almost all (41) consider that their wellbeing is important in the school and all have benefitted from professional learning opportunities. Four teachers provided written comments supportive of the vision for the school and feel valued in this school. Twenty (87%) non-teaching and support staff responded to the questionnaire, three of whom provided written responses. Almost all indicated that they enjoy working in and feel respected in the school.

Any issues raised in the questionnaires were shared with the principal and representatives of the governors.

Key actions

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

- Accommodation for pastoral and curriculum support for pupils with barriers to learning has been centralised in the school to facilitate a more inclusive approach to support.

- The staff from the SPiMS class have received support from the Education Authority (EA) Specialist Setting Support Team (SSST) and have completed the EA Autism Advisory and Intervention Service training, in addition to, alongside other classroom assistants, accessing further training from the Middletown Centre for Autism.
- The learning support teacher has been trained in a phonics programme and one of the two acting SENCOs has undertaken training in social-emotional learning and both are disseminating the practice to classroom assistants.
- A pilot for a knowledge-rich curriculum and a 'Learning to Learn' programme were introduced for teaching to the year 8 pupils in September 2023.
- The time allocation of targeted withdrawal support has doubled, from four to eight periods across all year groups.
- A monthly programme of teacher professional learning which prioritises learning and teaching has been established.
- The school reports that there has been no direct work with staff from the Education Authority's School Development Service since the last inspection.

Key findings

- The year 8 pupils who spoke to the inspectors reported that they find the 'Learning to Learn' programme very helpful in supporting them to develop strategies to build on their knowledge and they particularly enjoy retrieval quizzes. The pupils across years 8, 9 and 10 report that achievement points motivate them to contribute well in class and to give their best effort to their work. They find memory strategies, such as songs, help them with their

learning and they value building connections with their form teachers. The pupils reported that they would appreciate more opportunities to work in pairs or groups and would like to be consulted more frequently on how they learn best.

- There are improved lines of communication, accountability and support for staff as a result of the revised leadership structure, which is enabling them to lead to better effect in their areas of responsibility and to take forward whole-school improvement based on robust self-evaluation.
- The pupils benefit from the whole-school approach to target-setting and the close monitoring and evaluation of their progress and achievement, using an appropriate range of baseline and internal assessment data. Pupils identified as needing help with their learning are supported through a range of tailored interventions to suit their individual need, which includes pastoral and academic mentoring, and timebound withdrawal support in English, mathematics and science. The school has evaluated the effectiveness of these strategies to allow individual pupils to experience and celebrate success. The pupils understand the target setting process and commented on how it would be more useful if individual subject targets were reviewed and adapted more frequently.
- There are clear and consistent expectations for learning and behaviour in the school. Positive behaviour routines are embedded consistently across the school and the number of pupil suspensions has reduced significantly from the time of the last inspection.
- Pupils are well supported to overcome their barriers to learning. There are strong collaborative links with a wide range of external agencies. Pupils identified by the school as being at risk of disengaging with their learning are supported with a tailored social and academic plan to help build their self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

- The school's curriculum provision has been reviewed for each of the three year groups, in consultation with staff and pupils. The curriculum is more inclusive and accessible and is meeting better the needs of more of the pupils.
- The school is taking greater account of the progression of its pupils through links with its key stage (KS) 2 and KS 4 partner schools. Subject leaders across the junior and senior high schools in the area are collaborating on common goals, such as the development of practical skills and resources, resulting in smoother transition and improved KS 3 outcomes.
- Teacher professional learning is a high priority for the school. There has been a significant investment of time and resources to develop a common approach to learning and teaching, underpinned by a shared understanding of research- informed pedagogy. The emphasis on metacognition, including well-implemented strategies on themes such as retrieval practice, has improved the pupils' levels of independent learning and has resulted in a common and consistent approach to learning and teaching and important improvements in the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.
- In the more effective practice observed, the pupils benefit from well-structured lessons, with a review of previous learning and opportunities for working in pairs to share ideas and test theories. The well-embedded classroom routines help the pupils settle quickly to work and to remain on task throughout the lessons. The teachers use skilful questioning to prompt and encourage pupils to extend their responses with justification. There is an appropriately wide range of learning and teaching approaches, including assessment for learning strategies which support well pupils' understanding of new concepts. The school should continue to increase the opportunities for the pupils to develop their oral skills.

- The provision for English and mathematics has improved and is now effective. In English, standardised medium and long-term planning ensures all pupils engage critically with stimulating texts which allow for a range of good quality oral and written responses. In mathematics, the focus on lesson planning is creating an effective structure which is identifying greater opportunities to develop the pupils' mathematical thinking and to link their learning to real-life contexts and careers.
- The school needs to continue to monitor the quality of provision for the pupils attending the SPiMS class.

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 ongoing bespoke teacher professional learning in Lurgan Junior High School has resulted in a common and consistent approach to learning and teaching and important improvements in the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.

The ETI, through the engagement of the District Inspector, will continue to work with the school to take forward the areas for action 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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