

Education and Training Inspectorate



An Evaluation of the Quality of:
Strategic Planning; Learning; and
Transition Arrangements for Education
and Training in the BALLYMENA AREA

Area-Based Inspection: February-March 2009

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Quantitative Terms

A number of quantitative terms are used throughout the report to present the findings. These terms 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%

Part One

SUMMARY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are many challenges facing society. Rapid changes, driven by technological change and global economic activity, are taking place in the labour market. The demands of working life are changing and learners leaving school, college or universities face challenges and choices that are, in many ways, very different from those faced by previous generations. The pace of change is great, and its direction sometimes unpredictable. More than ever before, learners need to be fully equipped with the knowledge, skills, understanding, confidence and creativity needed for their future working lives, yet almost 21% of the working-age population in Northern Ireland (NI) have no qualifications. These issues present major challenges for policy-makers and providers of education and training
- 1.2 To address this imbalance, and in an attempt to ensure that our learners have the knowledge, skills and attributes to compete effectively in the market place, major initiatives have been introduced by the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning which affect almost every area of our education and training systems from pre school through to further education and training. These initiatives include the ongoing development of the Early Years Strategy; the school improvement policy - Every School A Good School; the Revised Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework; Specialist Schools and Extended Schools; the re-structuring of the further education colleges; the introduction of revised programmes for trainees; the development of the Youth Work Strategy, and the current development of Area Learning Communities.
- 1.3 The Chief Inspector's report 2006-2008 identified that at the centre of all our efforts must be the raising of the achievements and standards for children, young people and adult learners, particularly as NI has the highest proportion of the working-age population in the United Kingdom with no qualifications. The Report also identifies three key themes, namely:
- those with the responsibility for an individual's education need to build more effectively on the skills, knowledge and attributes which the learner has developed in the preceding phase;
 - they need to help learners understand better the connections in their individual programmes of learning, and how that learning connects to a better future for them and their community; and
 - educational leaders need to be confident that they are including all learners and working together to help them to achieve their full potential.

1.4 This area-based inspection model has been developed mainly to inform policy and provision at a strategic level in order to assist the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services, the employing authorities, and the relevant government departments to plan for and provide an education system which meets the demands for a flexible appropriately trained workforce in a rapidly changing employment market. During February and March 2009, the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) undertook an evaluation of the quality of education being provided in the Ballymena area. The evaluation assesses the extent to which a range of organisations in the area of Ballymena work together to provide coherent and relevant educational pathways for learners.

2. The Context of the Area

2.1 The Ballymena area includes Ballymena Town and the surrounding areas within the Ballymena District Council and is made up of 24 local council wards. It falls within the Northern Health and Social Services and North-Eastern Education and Library Board areas.

2.2 On census day 2001, the resident population of Ballymena Local Government District was 58,610, of which 22% were under 16 years old and 19.3% were aged 60 and over; 48.7% of the population were male and 51.3% were female. Just over half of the usually resident population of Ballymena live in the surrounding rural areas. The estimated population of Ballymena in 2007 was 62,118 and it is expected to rise to 68,540 in 2021. Fourteen per cent of the population aged 16-74 had degree level or higher qualifications and 60.8% had no or low-level of qualifications. The Ballymena District Council Area ranked as the 20th most deprived district council area in 2005, with around 10% of the population residing in the most deprived Super Output Areas¹. The most deprived Super Output Area in Ballymena is the Ballee Ward, which is ranked 137 out of the 890 areas in NI, while the least deprived Super Output Area is Ardeevin, with a rank of 865.

2.3 The education and training provision in the Ballymena area comprises two nursery schools, six nursery units, eleven voluntary/private pre-school centres, 20 primary schools, seven post-primary schools, one special school, two campuses of the Northern Regional College of Further Education and three training providers. There is also alternative education provision (AEP) in the form of an educational guidance centre and an education other than at school (EOTAS) programme. The youth provision consists of three controlled part-time units and three registered units, the majority of which are uniformed or faith-based organisations; there is no full-time centre-based statutory youth provision.

¹ Geographical locations used in the United Kingdom for statistical analysis.

- 2.4 Many of the schools in the Ballymena area draw their pupils from a wide catchment area including Antrim, Larne and the Glens of Antrim. In 2008, 60% of the post-primary pupils attended one of the three grammar schools and the remainder were dispersed among the four non-selective post-primary schools across the area. In 2007, 128 primary school children and 38 post-primary school pupils had English as an additional language; the percentage of post-primary school pupils entitled to free school meals was almost half the Northern Ireland (NI) average.
- 2.5 The pupil profile within the non-selective sector has changed markedly with an increase in the proportion of learners with special educational needs being educated in mainstream schools. As a result, some of the schools have to deal with complex and demanding pastoral and academic issues, including significant behavioural problems, a growing number of pupils on the child protection register and an increase in looked-after children.
- 2.6 A majority of young people in the schools in the Ballymena area achieve well, particularly the most able, at the end of key stage (KS) 4 and post-16. In 2008, 79.3% of the primary school children achieved the expected KS2 level in English and 83.9% in mathematics; these figures are just above and within five percentage points above the NI average, respectively. The percentage achieving at least five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades A*-C (or equivalent qualifications), including English and mathematics, was within five percentage points above the NI average. At post-16, the percentage of school leavers achieving two or more General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) levels (or equivalent qualifications) and the percentage entering higher education were also within five percentage points above the NI average.
- 2.7 By contrast, a higher proportion of learners underachieve in the Ballymena area compared with other areas in NI. In 2007, the percentage of pupils leaving the post-primary schools having achieved no GCSE qualifications was just above the NI average. The percentage of leavers recorded as unemployed was also just above the NI average.
- 2.8 Further information about the qualifications and destinations of school leavers is provided in Appendix 2.

3. The Evaluation

3.1 In February and March 2009, the Inspectorate carried out a pilot area-based inspection in the Ballymena area to evaluate the quality of education and training. The evaluation focused, in particular, on:

- strategic planning for education and training within the area;
- the quality of learning for young people within the area; and
- the effectiveness of the transition arrangements for young people within and across the various sectors.

3.2 The Inspectorate visited a sample of education and training providers, which included five pre-school centres, four primary schools, three post-primary schools, the AEP, a special school, a training organisation, the local further education college and three youth settings (see Appendix 1). Inspectors observed 89 lessons or sessions. They held discussions with representatives of the contributory organisations, including school principals, governors, members of senior leadership teams and middle managers, teachers, lecturers and trainers. The Inspectorate met with groups of parents from the contributory organisations, as well as with groups of pupils from each of years 7, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14, and with representatives of the student groups in further education, training and the youth sector. In addition, the Inspectorate held discussions with a wide range of other stakeholders including local employers, the Ballymena Area Learning Community, employing authorities and the careers service.

3.3 Prior to the evaluation, the senior managers of the organisations were invited to complete a self-evaluation of the quality of provision within their organisations with regard to the arrangements for strategic planning, quality of learning and the effectiveness of the transition arrangements. Most of these responses were of a high quality and made a valuable contribution to the inspection process.

4. Summary of Main Findings

4.2 STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE AREA

4.2.1 The main strengths are:

- the good or better development planning within individual organisations;
- the strong collaborative working arrangements among the post-primary schools in the area and the local college of further education;

- the strong commitment of the various local and regional community and business networks to support the work of the schools in improving standards; and
- the work of the Ballymena Area Learning Community in building effective community relations.

4.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the need to:

- develop cross-phase strategic planning, which is informed by self-evaluation and which takes better account of the current and future needs of all learners, employers and the wider community;
- provide increased opportunities for staff to share expertise across phases, in particular for those staff involved in teaching at the key transition stages; and
- develop further collaboration and quality assurance arrangements among organisations in order to improve the quality of transition planning, and ensure all learners have access to appropriate and coherent learning programmes.

4.3 QUALITY OF LEARNING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AREA

4.3.1 The main strengths are:

- the good or better quality of the learning in most of the sessions observed;
- the good standards achieved by the majority of learners, and in particular the outcomes achieved by the most able learners at the end of KS4 and post-16;
- the good or better quality of care, guidance and support and the commitment to, and the arrangements for, meeting the varying pastoral needs of the learners;
- in most organisations, the good range of extra-curricular and non-formal learning experiences to develop the learners' confidence, self-esteem and ability to work collaboratively; and
- the quality of the support provided for schools by staff from the Rathmore Educational Guidance Centre in equipping teachers with appropriate strategies to support those learners whose behaviour is challenging.

4.3.2 The main areas for improvement are the need to:

- build more effectively on the young peoples' prior learning in order to raise standards further, particularly in literacy at the end of KS4;
- improve the standards for the minority of learners who leave post-primary school with no GCSEs;
- identify a broader range of qualifications at level 2 and below which match better the full range of ability and aspirations of the learners;
- engage in joint curriculum planning and develop consistent approaches to teaching and learning across the key transition stages.

4.4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRANSITION ARRANGEMENTS IN THE AREA

4.4.1 The main strengths are:

- the good or better transition arrangements for children transferring from the primary sector to the post-primary sector; and
- in the majority of schools in the area, the quality of the learning experiences provided for young people, through the Youth Sector's transition and mentoring programmes.

4.4.2 The main area for improvement is the need to:

- improve communication and the transfer of information at an organisational and area level in order to plan for and track more effectively the progress of the learners.

Part Two

CONCLUSION & KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 In the areas inspected, the overall quality of education and training within the Ballymena area is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement. The evaluation has identified areas for improvement which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the learners are to be met effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report publicly on the progress made in addressing the areas for improvement.

6. Key Priorities for Development

To promote continuous improvement in the quality of the education and training within the Ballymena area this evaluation has identified a number of key priorities for development.

- 6.1 The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning need to:

- improve further strategic planning through liaising where necessary on current policies and those under development, in order that those which may relate to one sector, but impact substantially on others, enhance the educational pathways of all learners;
- communicate the intended outcomes and inter-relatedness of the policies, clearly and consistently to the education sector; and
- review funding of provision to encourage and facilitate increased collaboration within and across sectors.

- 6.2 **The key stakeholders² need to:**

- collaborate on a strategic plan which includes employers and the wider community, to meet more effectively the current and future needs of all learners and their community;
- facilitate the sharing of expertise between staff, in particular at the key transition stages;

² Key Stakeholders include the employing and managing authorities (currently ELBs and CCMS and from Jan 2010, the Education and Skills Authority) and other educational bodies for including NICIE, CNaG, LSDA.

- establish systems which communicate better at each key transition point³ the attainment, the needs and the progress of each learner; and
- support the development of self-evaluation as a means of identifying the most appropriate forms of learning across key transition stages.

6.4 **The organisations⁴ need to:**

- build more effectively on the prior learning at key transition stages in order to raise the standards for all learners and in particular to address the needs of those learners who leave education with no qualifications;
- develop joint curriculum planning to ensure continuity and progression in learning across the key transition stages;
- identify a broader range of qualifications at level 2 and below which match better the full range of ability and aspirations of the pupils; and
- ensure better communication and the transfer of information in order to plan more effectively for, and track, the progress of learners.

³ Key transition points include transition from pre-school to primary school, primary school to post-primary school, and from post-primary school to further education and training. It may also refer to changes between Key Stage One and Two within a primary school and Key Stages Three, Four and post-16 at post-primary level.

⁴ Organisations include pre-school providers, primary schools, post-primary schools, special schools, further education colleges, training organisations, alternative education providers and the youth service.

THE ORGANISATIONS INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

Pre-School

Ballymena Nursery School

Dunclug Playgroup

First Steps Playgroup

Kenbann Playgroup

St Louis Playgroup

Primary Schools

Camphill Primary School

St Brigid's Primary School

St Colmcille's Primary School

Dunclug Primary School

Post-Primary Schools

Ballymena Academy

Dunclug High School

St Patrick's High School

Special School

Castle Tower Special School

Alternative Education Providers

Rathmore Guidance Centre

Ballykeel Education other than at School Centre

Further Education

Northern Regional College

Training

Seven Towers Training Organisation

Youth Service

QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION

Table showing the highest qualification of school leavers resident in Ballymena 2006/07⁽¹⁾

	Percentage of Leavers achieving 2 or more A levels (or equivalent qualifications)	Percentage of Leavers achieving at least 5 GCSE's grades A*-C (or equivalent qualifications)	Percentage of Leavers achieving at least 5 GCSE's grades A*-C (or equivalent qualifications) inc English & maths	Percentage of Leavers achieving no GCSE's	Total Leavers
Ballymena District Council	48.2	64.5	57.6	5.8	738
NI Average	44.6	64.7	54.2	3.9	24803

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Destination of school leavers resident in Ballymena 2006/07⁽¹⁾

	Percentage recorded as entering Higher Education	Percentage recorded as entering Further Education	Percentage recorded as entering Employment	Percentage recorded as entering Training	Percentage recorded as Unemployed	Percentage recorded as Unknown	Total Leavers
Ballymena District Council	41.1	26.6	13.0	13.3	4.3	1.8	738
NI Average	38.5	27.4	12.1	15.9	3.3	2.8	24803

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Destination of NI school leavers by qualification 2006/07

	Percentage recorded as entering Higher Education	Percentage recorded as entering Further Education	Percentage recorded as entering Employment	Percentage recorded as entering Training	Percentage recorded as Unemployed	Percentage recorded as Unknown
2+ A Levels (inc equivalents)	85.1	6.7	6.0	0.5	1.0	0.7
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc equivalents)	59.4	23.1	8.8	5.4	1.7	1.6
No GCSEs	0.0	13.8	23.5	32.0	16.1	14.6
Total Leavers	38.5	27.4	12.1	15.9	3.3	2.8

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Destination of school leavers resident in Ballymena district council by qualification 2006/07

	Percentage recorded as entering Higher Education	Percentage recorded as entering Further Education	Percentage recorded as entering Employment	Percentage recorded as entering Training	Percentage recorded as Unemployed	Percentage recorded as Unknown
2+ A Levels (inc equivalents)	84.8	6.2	7.3	0.0	*	*
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc equivalents)	63.7	19.3	9.9	3.8	1.5	1.9
No GCSEs	0.0	*	20.9	41.9	25.6	*
Total Leavers	41.1	26.6	13.0	13.3	4.3	1.8

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Destination of school leavers resident in Ballymena settlement by qualification 2006/07

	Percentage recorded as entering Higher Education	Percentage recorded as entering Further Education	Percentage recorded as entering Employment	Percentage recorded as entering Training	Percentage recorded as Unemployed	Percentage recorded as Unknown
2+ A Levels (inc equivalents)	81.2	7.4	8.7	0.0	*	*
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc equivalents)	61.6	19.2	11.6	3.5	*	2.5
No GCSEs	0.0	*	17.9	50.0	17.9	*
Total Leavers	37.0	28.8	13.0	13.6	5.2	2.4

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Key Stage 1 Assessments for schools in the Ballymena District Council 2007/08

	Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 or above		Percentage of pupils achieving Level 3 or above	
	English	Maths	English	Maths
Ballymena District Council	96.5	96.8	40.2	50.3
NI Average	94	94.6	40.3	46.5

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

Key Stage 2 Assessments for schools in the Ballymena District Council 2007/08

	Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above		Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above	
	English	Maths	English	Maths
Ballymena District Council	79.3	83.9	28.1	41.2
NI Average	78.8	80.6	27.7	41.1

(Source: School Leavers Survey)

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