

Report of a Post-primary Inspection

St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
DE Ref No 542-0304

September 2025



Education and
Training Inspectorate
Empowering Improvement

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF.....	1
C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION	1
2. MAIN REPORT	2
A. SETTING THE VISION.....	2
B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION.....	2
C. BUILDING EQUITY	4
D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	4
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING	5
F. CHILD PROTECTION	6
3. NEXT STEPS.....	6
4. APPENDICES	7
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS	7

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Patrick's Academy is a maintained, co-educational, 11-18 voluntary grammar school which is situated just outside the centre of Dungannon in County Tyrone. The original Boys' and Girls' Academies amalgamated in 2003 and moved into a new building in 2018. The school attracts pupils from a wide catchment area from over 50 feeder primary schools; the current enrolment stands at 1476 pupils. The number of pupils in the sixth form has risen from 376 pupils in 2023 to 433 pupils in 2025. Around six per cent of the pupils have free school meals entitlement. A small proportion of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), a significant minority of whom have a statement of SEN. A small number of newcomer pupils attend the school.

The school has a long-standing shared education partnership with Royal School Dungannon and is an active member of the Dungannon and Cookstown Area Learning Community (ALC).

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

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

The responses to the questionnaires are referenced, where relevant, within the main body of the report. A high-level summary of the questionnaire responses, including any concerns raised, was shared with the principal and five representatives of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside St Patrick's Academy to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school's vision of **Achieving Excellence Together** permeates all aspects of school life. Underpinned by the Catholic ethos, the outworking of the vision creates a very strong sense of identity, loyalty and partnership among the pupils and across the wider school community. The vision is at the centre of school improvement and promotes ambition and high expectations for all in a nurturing, attractive and stimulating learning environment which fosters fairness, trust and mutual respect. The staff work collegially, embracing collaboration as **Partners in the pursuit of excellence**, and the pupils are provided with meaningful opportunities to lead on aspects of school improvement.

The school development plan (SDP) sets out a strong evaluative baseline underpinned by robust self-evaluation, rigorous analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and meaningful and regular consultation with all stakeholders. The departmental action plans are aligned well with the SDP, however, there is variation in the quality of departmental planning.

The governors bring a wide range of experience and skills to their role, complemented by their in-depth knowledge of the school and its community. The governors are passionate about ensuring the pupils are at the centre of all decisions and have supported the principal in the strategic review of senior leadership roles and responsibilities to reflect better the school's context and to meet the pastoral and academic needs of the pupils.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The pupils are highly motivated, happy learners who engage enthusiastically with the learning and enjoy working with others in pairs and groups. Their behaviour is exemplary, and they are kind, respectful and friendly in their engagement with their peers, the staff and visitors. In our questionnaires and in discussions, the pupils told us about the high levels of support they receive from their teachers and other adults both in and beyond the classroom, and this care and support was also highlighted positively in the questionnaire returns from parents.

The planning, teaching and assessment for learning across the school is mostly effective. Where the learning was most effective, the planning was matched to the needs and interests of the pupils, teachers had high expectations for all, with good pace and challenge, and facilitated creative learning opportunities enabling the pupils to make progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. Effective assessment strategies, including meaningful plenary sessions, were used well to help the pupils reflect on and improve their work, and to inform future learning.

In the less effective practice, the planning did not take sufficient account of the pupils' individual needs and prior learning, and, on occasion, the lessons were overly directed by the teacher and lacked challenge. It will be important to improve consistency of high-quality learning experiences for all pupils and the planned reintroduction of first-hand evaluations of learning, as outlined in the SDP, will support the school in taking forward this area for action.

The broad and balanced pupil-centred curriculum supports the holistic development of the pupils and enables them to experience success. At key stage (KS) 4 and post-16, the curriculum offer meets the requirements of the Entitlement Framework, including an appropriate mix of general and applied subjects. Collaboration with the post-primary schools in the ALC adds to flexibility and choice of subjects within the curriculum. Monitoring of the provision includes tracking pupils' destinations, and this information is used well to inform the school's effective processes for curriculum design and review.

The pupils engage enthusiastically in subject-specific digital learning and demonstrate emerging proficiency in using digital tools. The discrete information and communication technology (ICT) lessons throughout KS 3 provide structured opportunities for pupils to develop key digital competencies aligned with KS 4 pathways. The Minecraft club is a very popular extra-curricular activity for the pupils to develop their digital skills and make friends.

A progressive and coherent careers education, information, advice and guidance programme is delivered by a consistent team of staff. The pupils report that they receive accurate, impartial and relevant advice, feel supported, and are confident that their course combination and choices align with their aspirations. Beyond the taught programme of careers, pupils benefit from a broad range of additional careers-related opportunities which, they report, broadens their awareness and understanding of specific industries and career progression routes, including apprenticeships.

The highly effective provision for health, well-being and keeping safe is underpinned by the school's strong Catholic ethos and evidenced by the highly supportive environment and the deep levels of care, consideration and respect for all members of the school community. The school seeks the views of the pupils, parents and staff to help design a preventative curriculum, which is equipping the pupils with the knowledge and skills to help them make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

The strong and proactive emphasis on building resilience helps the pupils to manage challenging situations and new experiences. We joined year 8 pupils in a workshop where they engaged in team building exercises to forge friendships and learned about strategies to cope with change.

A notable strength of the post-16 enrichment programme is the establishment of the compassionate and approachable pupil groups leading on period dignity, emotional health and well-being, and bereavement. The pupils provide sensitive support for their peers with a clear focus on removing practical barriers, promoting open discussion and reducing stigma surrounding mental health challenges. The pupils told us that, through this important work, they are developing a wide range of life and leadership skills that significantly enrich their own personal, social and emotional development.

In discussions with inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe and secure in school. They know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. In our questionnaires, the pupils referenced positively the special role their form teacher plays in caring for them.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The school has a clear emphasis on ensuring the provision is equitable and accessible to all. The school shared examples of increased pupil engagement, motivation and attendance, and progress and success as a result of a range of well-considered interventions and targeted support. The pupils show maturity in their interactions with others, and, through their leadership roles, senior pupils help the younger pupils with their learning and encourage and support pupil participation and inclusion in the wider aspects of school life.

The staff work well with external agencies to provide sensitive support for families who are facing challenges, and other initiatives include the pre-loved uniform scheme and complimentary hot porridge - a particular highlight among the new year 8 pupils, when we joined them in the breakfast club. Pupil attendance, monitored by the school as a key indicator of engagement and well-being, is high with a rate of 95.2% in 2024-25. The school's attendance policy, reviewed and ratified annually, underpins a robust system of early intervention, with pupil absence addressed swiftly and sensitively.

Strengths of the provision for pupils with SEN include the early identification of, and response to, the pupils' needs and the flexible deployment of the classroom assistants making best use of their knowledge and skills. Classroom assistants who met with us spoke enthusiastically about how they have benefitted from, and how they apply, their professional learning to meet the individual needs of the pupils for whom they provide support. Where parents made explicit reference to SEN in our questionnaire, they were extremely positive about the provision for their child, highlighting the effective and regular home-school communication, the dedicated care and support their child receives from the staff and the good progress they are making in their learning and personal and social development.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The success of current and former pupils is valued and celebrated widely across and beyond the school. The pupils shared with us their achievements and those of their peers, including in music, drama, public speaking, art and sport. The pupils expressed their appreciation for how their teachers help them balance the demands of participating in activities beyond school, including in high-level competitions, and keeping up with schoolwork. A vibrant extra-curricular and enrichment programme and opportunities, including competitions, educational visits and accredited programmes such as [The Duke of Edinburgh's](#), [The President's](#) and [The John Paul II Awards](#) enable the pupils to collaborate beyond the classroom, developing their personal and social skills and attaining recognition for their commitment, engagement and achievement.

The staff monitor closely the pupils' progress from their individual starting points from entry into year 8 and evidence, including from the wide range of interventions, including peer mentoring, indicates that most pupils make steady progress from their baseline position. In reviewing the arrangements for assessment, reporting and target-setting across curricular areas, the school has prioritised the sharing of effective practice to improve consistency in the accuracy of pupils' target grades; the inspection endorses this work going forward.

The pupils attain high standards in public examinations. In 2025, almost all (98%) of the year 12 pupils who attained seven GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C achieved in line with their ability. In 2025, almost all pupils progressed from year 12 to year 13 and nearly all year 13 pupils progressed to year 14. In 2025, most (85%) of the year 14 pupils attained three A Level (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C and almost all pupils progressed to higher education, higher-level apprenticeships or further education.

The staff have identified appropriately the need to close the gap between the girls' and the boys' attainment. Good progress has been made in closing this attainment gap at post-16 and the school is now focusing on implementing a range of actions to address the issue further at KS 4.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The pupils benefit significantly from the extensive range of partnerships with others, including past pupils, business and industry, charitable and community organisations. These partnerships play a vital role in realising the school's vision. The pupils understand and value local and global diversity and engage readily with different perspectives, living out their commitment to social justice.

Through the highly effective student council processes and other creative initiatives, pupils are leading aspects of school improvement. They are enabled to put forward their ideas, which are considered and acted upon. As a result, tangible improvements have been made, for example, in relation to support for emotional health and well-being, digital learning resources and homework policy and practice, which the pupils report are having a very positive impact on school life.

The school values highly its partnership with parents and provides a range of opportunities for parents to connect with, and participate in, school life such as workshops, events and regular communication. This work, together with feeder primary schools and the transition and intervention programmes, support well the pupils' induction into the school and their progress as they move through the key stages. In the questionnaires, parents credited the induction and settling in arrangements for their child's happy and successful start in their new school and 99.7% of the pupils in years 8 and 9 said that the teachers and other adults helped them settle in when they started the school.

The school's longstanding partnership with a local post-primary school includes shared education initiatives embracing art, history, sports and post-16 shared classes. The pupils from both schools told us that they enjoy learning together and making new friends. The schools plan to extend further the partnership to include more sustained contact between the pupils.

The school plans strategically for staff professional learning, which aligns closely with the school development plan priorities and is informed by pupils' feedback on the learning and teaching. A culture of support, sharing and learning together was evident in the staff questionnaires. An active member of the local ALC, the school

has participated in a variety of working groups which have led to improvements in the school's provision and informed pupil and staff learning. Importantly, the ALC has recently secured funding to host a major conference for teachers across the ALC on a wide range of learning and teaching topics, supporting the implementation of the Department of Education's [TransformEd NI Strategy](#).

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align with the current statutory guidance.

3. NEXT STEPS

A strong sense of partnership, mutual respect and high expectations for all means that the school's vision of **Achieving Excellence Together** is being implemented very effectively. As set out in the school's current development plan, the next step for St Patrick's Academy is to take forward the area for action, which is:

- to ensure consistency in the quality of planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning.

The District Inspector will monitor the school's progress in addressing the area for action, as part of ETI's normal monitoring processes.

Inspectors identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- how the staff facilitate the pupils to lead successfully on aspects of school improvement; and
- the meaningful collaboration with a community of learning that extends and enhances the pupils' learning experiences.

4. APPENDICES

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%

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2025

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the [ETI website](#).

Follow us on  [@ETI_news](#)  [@ETInews](#)  Empowering
Improvement
Stepping Forward Together