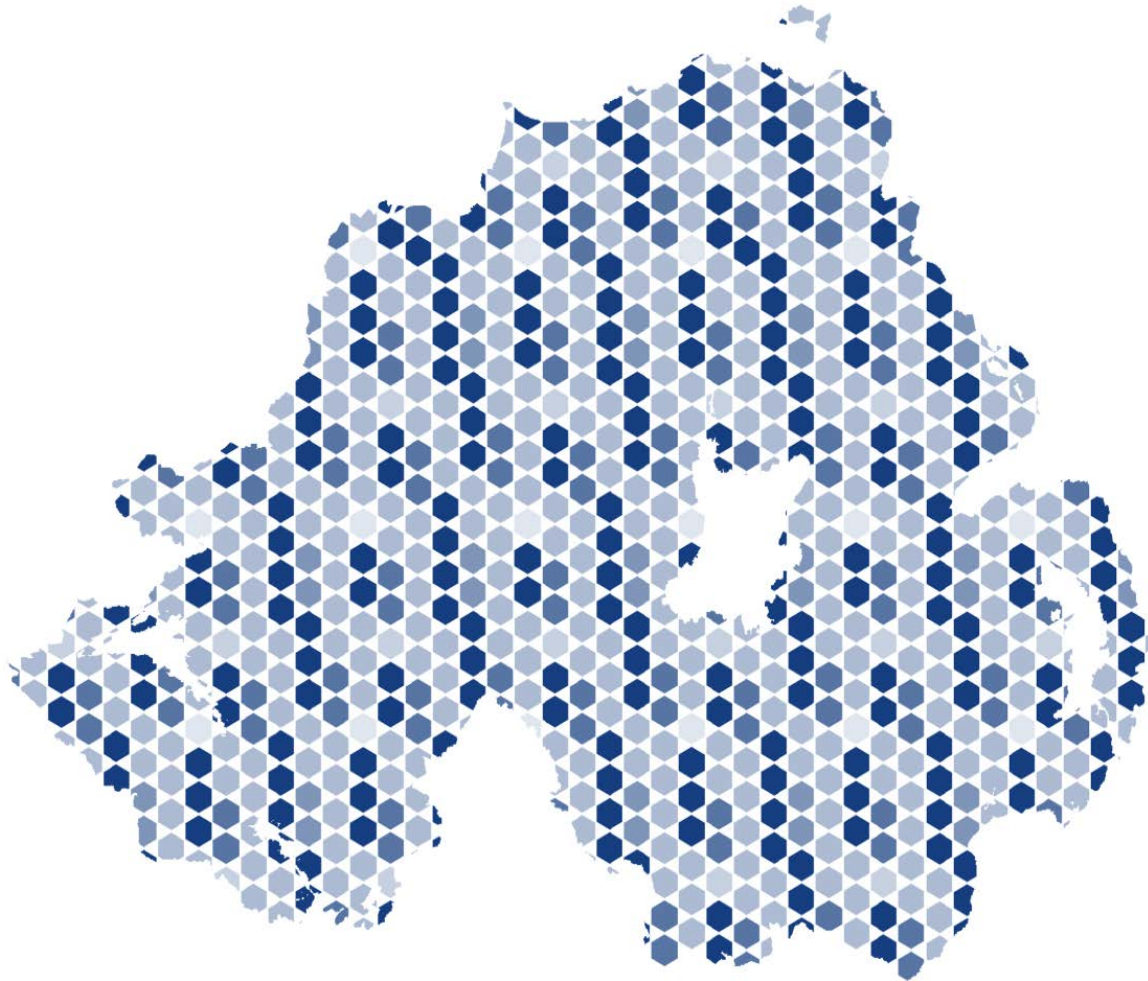


Education and Training Inspectorate

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint, County Down

Maintained, non-selective, co-educational 11-19 school DE Ref No (523-0135)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in September 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint, County Down (523-0135)

Introduction

The previous inspection in April 2016 evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Mark's High School as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. In the interim the senior leadership team (SLT) has been restructured and two new senior leaders appointed. The school has been involved in an extensive refurbishment programme including the addition of four new classrooms to accommodate science, a sixth form area, a study hall and an information and technology suite.

A sustaining improvement inspection was conducted in September 2019.

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 members of the senior leadership would be co-operating with the inspection. 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.

Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The lines of inquiry during the inspection were the school's actions to:

- improve further the outcomes for students at key stage (KS) 4, through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum; and
- develop the provision of careers education, information and guidance.

Owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking and impact of the identified actions associated with lines of inquiry.

Key findings

- The SLT have very good understanding of and a shared vision for school improvement and lead effectively the on-going improvement work in the school. There is a culture of self-evaluation in the school and the school improvement work is linked to an appropriate, well-tailored programme of continuous staff development.
- The review of the curriculum at KS 4 and subsequent changes made to widen the subject offer and create alternative pathways for the pupils has impacted positively on the outcomes they achieve. The curriculum offer at KS4 is flexible and meets effectively the needs, ability and interests of the pupils.

- Since the original inspection the percentage of pupils attaining five or more examinations at GCSE at grades A*-C has improved from 58% in 2016 to 92% in 2019. This is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools¹. When English and mathematics are included, the majority of pupils attaining at grades A*-C GCSE or equivalent is also well above the NI average for similar schools and has improved from 52% in 2016 to 60% in 2019. Overall the outcomes for the pupils at key stage 4 have improved significantly.
- Careers education, information and guidance is a key priority on the school development plan. Over the last three years appropriate strategies have been used to raise the profile of careers throughout the school, including: the hosting of an annual fair, the inclusion of a careers week in the school calendar; and, providing more opportunities for the pupils to develop their awareness of the skills and qualities needed for future employability. The school has been successful in broadening pupils' knowledge of the skills, qualities and qualifications required for the world of work through the development of a network of partnerships between the school and local business. The senior pupils who met with the inspectors spoke highly of the guidance and support they receive in the school which enables them to make informed choices about appropriate career pathways.
- The pupils who met with the inspectors spoke very positively about their experiences in school in particular they highlighted: the caring and supportive teachers; the family atmosphere in the school and their enjoyment of a wide range of activities provided for them beyond the classroom.
- The ETI was unable to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching within the classrooms.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. 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.

Conclusion

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by almost all of the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the pupils. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

¹ In the same Free School Meals band.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2019

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: www.etini.gov.uk