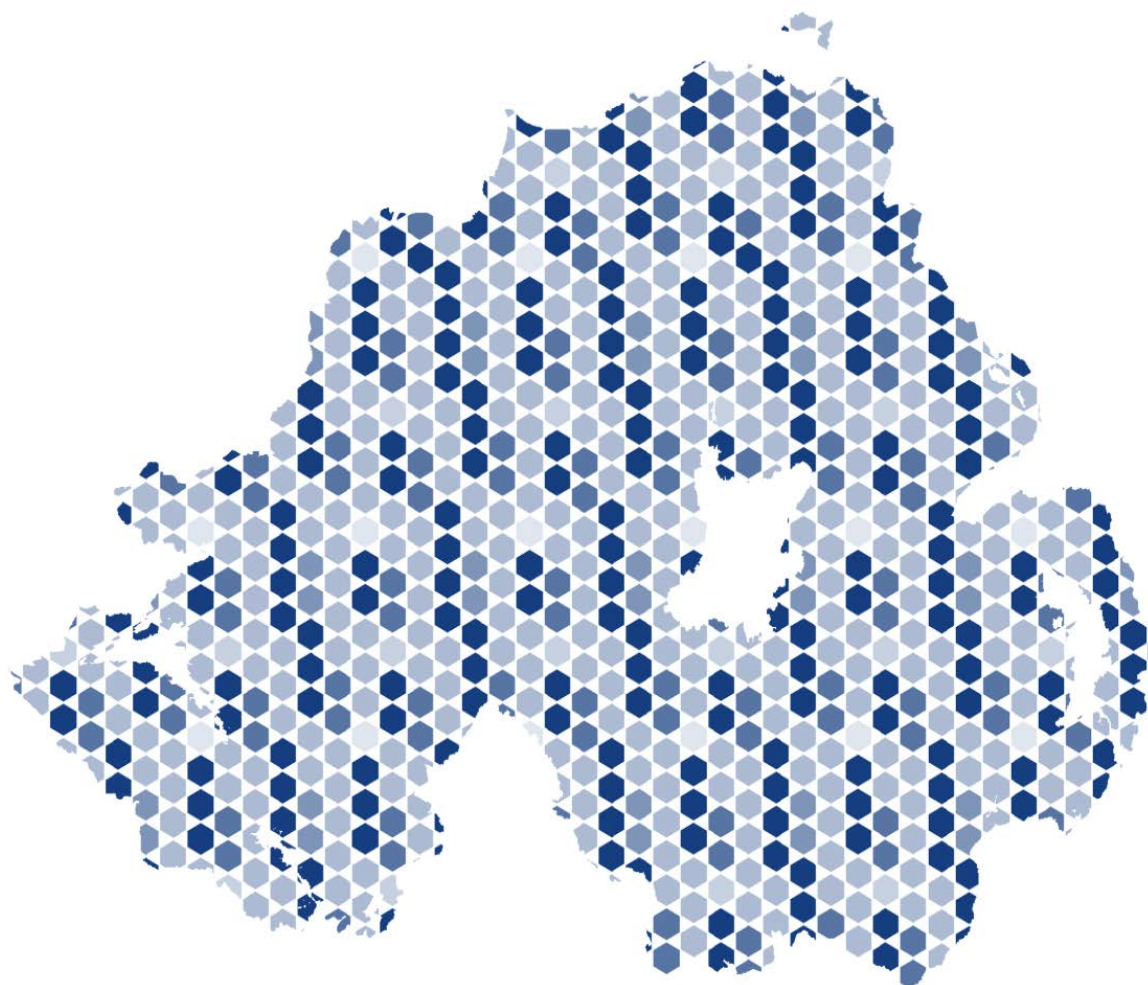


Education and Training Inspectorate POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Slemish College, Ballymena, County Antrim

Grant-maintained co-educational integrated school DE Ref No (326-0289)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in January 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of Slemish College, Ballymena (326-0289)

Introduction

The previous inspection in January 2016¹ evaluated the overall effectiveness of Slemish College as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement.

In the interim, a new principal has recently been appointed. A development proposal to increase the admission number from 120 to 140 pupils has been approved and enrolment has risen from 750 at the time of the inspection in 2016 to 810 pupils currently.

A sustaining improvement inspection was conducted in January 2019.

Focus of the inspection

The purpose of the SII was to evaluate 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 SII were the school's actions to:

- improve further the outcomes attained by the pupils in public examinations at post-16; and
- enhance and promote the pupils' well-being and mental health.

Key findings

- In the period since the last inspection, the standards attained by the pupils at post-16 have risen significantly and have been consistently well above the average for similar schools in the same free school meals band. Over the last three years, all of the individual subjects² are performing in line with, or above, the respective subject averages at grades A* to C.
- As a result of the school's rigorous review of the post-16 curriculum, the subjects are better matched to the needs, abilities and career aspirations of the pupils. The pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education is enhanced through carefully tailored work placements and high levels of participation in university summer schools.
- There is a purposeful staff development programme, complemented by regular opportunities to share good practice in planning for learning, teaching and assessment at post-16. The teachers' regular written and oral assessments highlight key strengths and give the year 13 and year 14 pupils clear, constructive guidance on improving the quality of their work. In the best practice, the pupils' self-assessments enable them to identify the specific support they need from their teachers and, accordingly, inform the teachers' planning. All of the lessons observed during the SII, most of which were at post-16, were highly effective in extending the pupils' learning and deepening their understanding.

¹ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/post-primary-inspection-slemish-college-ballymena-county-antrim.pdf>

² In those subjects for which there are corresponding NI subject averages.

- Following extensive consultation with pupils and staff, complemented by the analysis of pastoral information, the school identified the need to develop further the support for the pupils' mental health and well-being. Professional development for the whole staff and specialist training for individual teachers has extended effectively the school's provision in this area. Through external funding, the pastoral leaders have established a 'wellness room' and associated listening service which are accessed regularly and help pupils manage issues related to anxiety and stress. The pastoral staff and pupils report that these initiatives are having a positive impact on attendance and engagement in learning. The school's preventative curriculum is embedded in the taught pastoral programme and enriched through links with an appropriately wide range of external agencies, as well as through collaboration within the Ballymena Learning Together area learning community.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported how highly they value the strong working relationships with their teachers which are characterised by mutual respect and trust. They appreciate and benefit from the ethos of care and support for every pupil.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe in school, are well informed about keeping safe and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

Conclusion

Slemish College continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the pupils. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

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