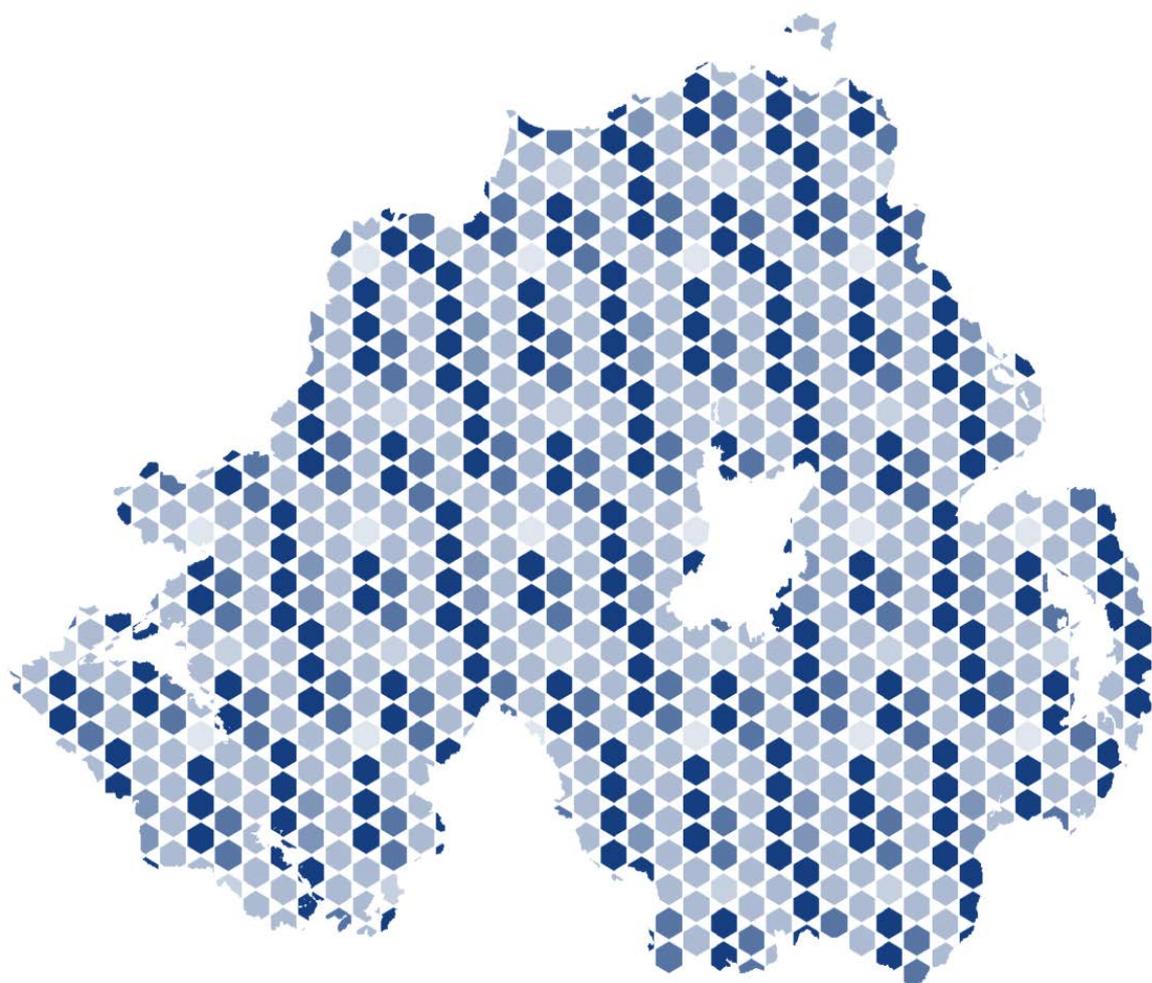


# Education and Training Inspectorate POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



## St Catherine's College, Armagh

Maintained, non-selective all-ability 11-18 school, including a co-educational Irish Medium Stream (An Sruth Gaelige) DE Ref No: 523-0218

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in March 2020



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## **Introduction**

St Catherine's College took part in the pilot of the sustaining improvement inspection in December 2016. Since the last inspection the senior leadership team has been re-structured and extended. The school's Irish Medium Stream, An Sruth Gaelige, is over-subscribed; its enrolment has been increasing year-on-year and stands currently at 144. Almost one-half of the Irish Medium Stream pupils are boys, of whom a small number return to Sixth Form.

A sustaining improvement inspection was conducted in March 2020.

## **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:

- provide a curriculum that achieves success for all pupils and prepares them for their adult economic well-being in a society to which they can make a positive contribution; and
- support and improve the emotional health and well-being of the whole school community.

## **Key findings**

- All of the lessons observed during the inspection were very good or outstanding. A key characteristic of the highly effective practice is the excellent relationships in the classrooms. The teachers know the pupils well and use their insight to enable the pupils to become learning leaders. Effective questioning is used skilfully by the teachers to challenge and extend the learning. The very good integration of information and communication technology enhances the pupils' creative and independent thinking skills and they can communicate effectively and collaboratively in a number of digital forms.
- The senior leadership team is highly collegial and has a shared strategic vision for securing the best possible learning experiences and outcomes for all pupils; the needs of the pupils are at the centre of the school improvement agenda. The school development plan is: well-informed by a range of first-hand evidence, including consultation with all stakeholders; evaluative; and, identifies clearly the actions to promote improvement.
- The outcomes achieved by the pupils in public examinations at key stage (KS) 4 and post-16 continue to be a key strength of the work of the school. The pupils have equal opportunity of access to the range of curriculum pathways at both KS4 and post-16 and, as a consequence, the outcomes at post-16 are improving. Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils achieving three or more A levels or equivalent at grades A\* to C has increased significantly from 64.8% in 2016 to 80.5% in 2019.

- The school's curriculum is flexible, responsive to the pupils' needs and aspirations, well-informed by transitional data and adapted annually to ensure personalised provision. It takes very good account of the current labour market and the careers programme facilitates strong links with industry and employers. Pupils who present with barriers to learning are identified early and an extensive range of therapeutic interventions is available to support these pupils. The school has undertaken a comprehensive review of the curriculum offer at both key stage (KS) 4 and post-16 to meet better the needs, aspirations and interests of the pupils and to prepare them better for their adult life. The school has introduced a small number of vocational qualifications at KS 4 with progression routes to level three courses and to further and higher education. At post-16, the curriculum offer continues to be extended by collaboration within the Armagh Area Learning Community.
- The emotional health and well-being of the school community is afforded a high priority and is founded on the nurturing ethos of the school. Following an audit to identify the range and extent of emotional health and well-being issues, in consultation with the pupils, a framework addressing these issues was implemented. The fusion of the pastoral and the academic, underpinned by key pastoral documentation, features in the planning of all subject areas and is central to the framework. This ensures a holistic approach to the promotion of the pupils' resilience and management of their emotional and mental health. The preventative curriculum is highly responsive to contemporary issues, and is complemented by a well-conceived programme of teacher professional learning. Staff well-being is also prioritised with school development days allocated to promote healthy minds and bodies.
- In discussions with inspectors, the pupils from across the key stages spoke confidently and with pride about the school and the values and skills they are developing. They were very appreciative of the way in which the staff support them in all aspects of their lives and how self-belief is fostered at all levels. In particular, the pupils highlighted the work of the pupil support centre and the chaplaincy service and the benefit of the re-furnished social and recreational space. The pupils reported that they have many opportunities to develop leadership skills for example, as pastoral prefects and subject mentors and through their charitable and sporting roles, as well as in peer-led support groups.

### **Safeguarding**

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

### **Conclusion**

St Catherine's College continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

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