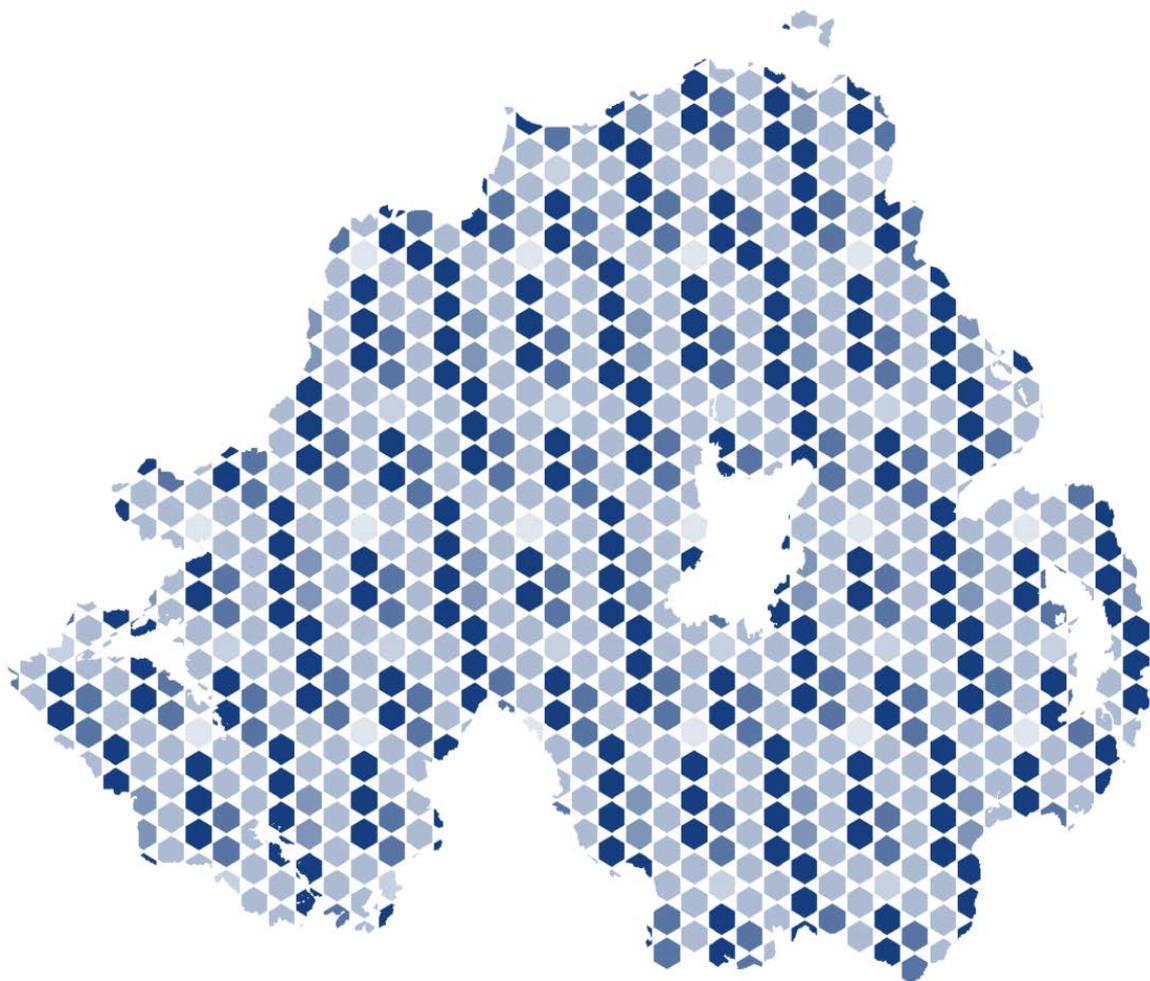


Education and Training Inspectorate POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Columbanus' College, Bangor, County Down

Non-selective, co-educational 11-18 school DE Ref No: 423-0107

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in March 2020



The Education and Training Inspectorate
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Introduction

The previous inspection in January 2017 evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Columbanus' College as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement¹. In the interim, there have been some changes to senior and middle leadership, the sixth form transition programme ceased in June 2017, and the school has received additional mobile accommodation to meet the increasing pupil enrolment. The school continues to participate as a member of the North Down and Ards Area Learning Community, and the Bangor Learning Partnership; and through its shared education partnership with two post-primary schools it has achieved the Rights Respecting Schools Award, Silver: Rights Aware.

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 line of inquiry during the inspection was the school's actions to continue to:

- sustain and improve further the overall standards attained by pupils at key stage (KS) 4 and post-16 through continuing to focus on learning and teaching and curriculum review.

Key findings

- All of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective and incorporated a broad range of strategies, which included well-targeted questioning to develop the pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills, differentiated tasks with supportive feedback on progress, and a good variety of practical and theory work to reinforce and secure the learning. Since the last inspection, the staff of the college have embarked on a programme of continuous professional development and sharing of best practice; this work is ongoing and central to the college development plan. Classroom observations and feedback on lessons are carried out regularly at departmental and whole school levels. There is a clear and sustained emphasis on developing effective classroom practice and ensuring the focus is on the pupils' learning.
- The data team have well-defined roles and responsibilities; they work collegially and strategically to support the ongoing improvement work in the school. Qualitative and quantitative data is well-analysed and evaluated to assess the pupils' progress across the curriculum, monitor learning support interventions, and to set realistic and challenging targets to help pupils achieve in line with their ability.
- The outcomes achieved by the pupils in public examinations at key stage (KS) 4 continue to be a key strength of the work of the school. Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications (including equivalents) at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has remained

¹ https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/post-primary-inspection-st-columbanus-college-bangor-county-down-423-0107_0.pdf

above the Northern Ireland (NI) average²; and the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications (including equivalents) at grades A* to C increased from 71.6% in 2016 to 88.6% in 2019.

- Since the last inspection, while the proportion of pupils attaining three or more A level qualifications (including equivalents) dropped below the NI average³, the school acted swiftly and strategically to effect improvement by making appropriate curricular changes to meet the varying needs of the pupils. Consequently, the outcomes in 2019 increased to 51.5%.
- Since the last inspection the school has continued to broaden its curriculum to sustain viable progression pathways for the pupils. At KS4 and post-16, the curriculum meets the entitlement framework and it is kept under constant review: it is flexible and adapts each year through collaboration within the area learning community to meet the needs and aspirations of the pupils, as evidenced by the high outcomes at KS4, the improving outcomes at post-16 which are in line with the corresponding NI average, and the high progression rates to the next stage of education or employment.
- The pupils from across the key stages were friendly, articulate and confident. They spoke positively about their learning experiences across the curriculum, the pastoral and academic support they receive from their teachers and classroom assistants, and the opportunities to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities including cultural, sporting and community-based events, which provide meaningful leadership and team-work experiences. The senior pupils spoke with pride about their journey through school and the school's community ethos. They expressed appreciation for the guidance and support they receive to make informed choices about subjects and career options.

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 Columbanus' 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.

² For schools in the same free school meal band.

³ For schools in the same free school meal band.

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