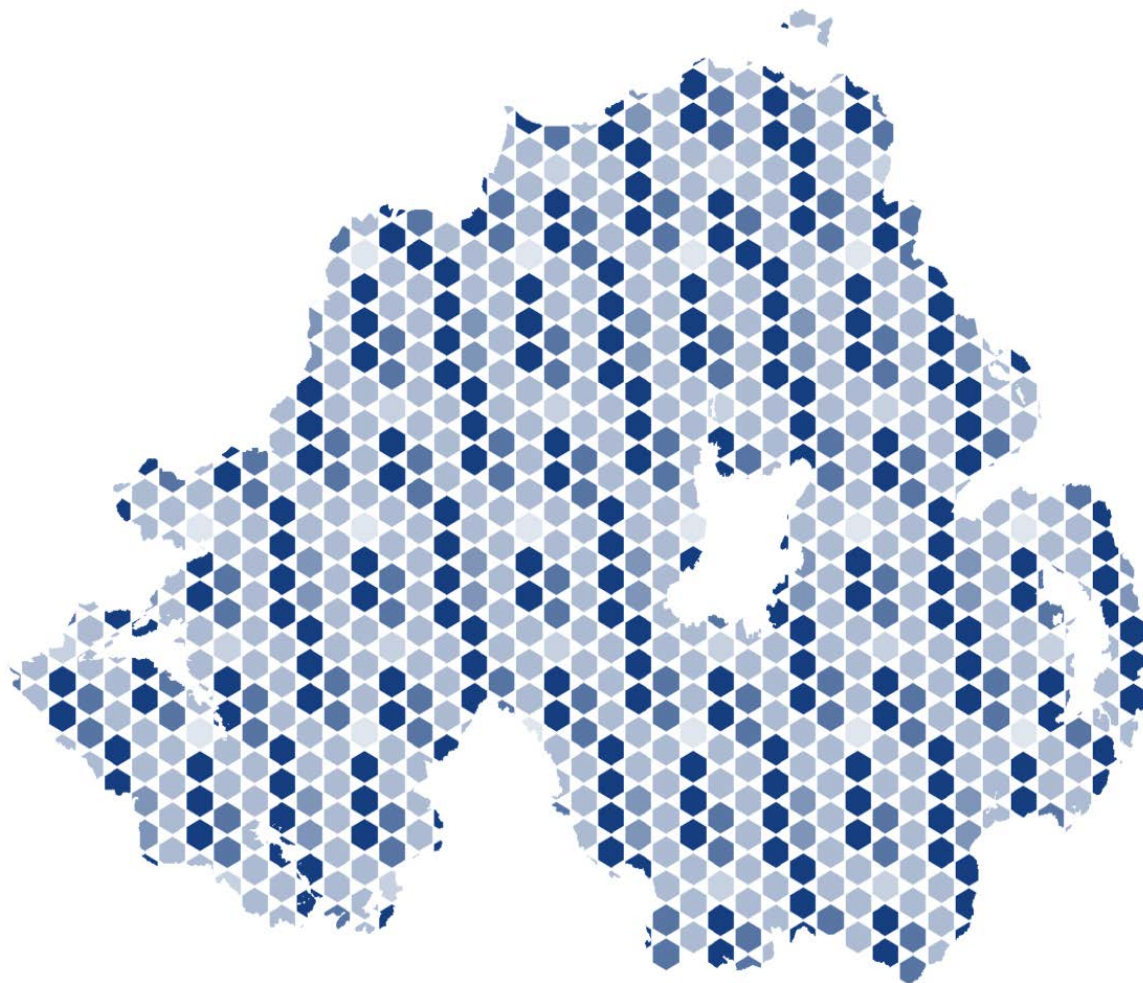


Education and Training Inspectorate

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, County Armagh

11-19 co-educational, maintained, non-selective DE Ref No (523-0157)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in January 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, County Armagh (523-0157)

Introduction

The previous inspection in January 2016¹, evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Paul's High School as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted in January 2019.

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 SII were the school's actions to:

- increase further the high proportion of key stage 4 pupils achieving five GCSEs or equivalents, including English and mathematics, at grades A*-C; and
- live out fully the school's mission statement of '*providing high quality education in an atmosphere of mutual respect where each individual is valued as an important member of our school family*'.

Key findings

- The senior leadership team, with the support of the staff and school community, have focused clearly on creating a culture of inclusion, aspiration and achievement, where the holistic development of every pupil is of paramount importance. The work undertaken since the last inspection has been strategic, systematic and highly effective in improving further the provision for learning and raising further the standards the pupils attain.
- Attainment by the pupils at five GCSEs, or equivalents, at grades A*-C including English and mathematics, remains significantly above the NI average for similar schools². In 2018, the outcomes for the pupils at this important benchmark were more than 30 percentage points above the NI average for similar schools. It is notable that the pupils' outcomes in both GCSE English and GCSE mathematics are significantly above the respective NI average for similar schools. The GCSE outcomes for the pupils entitled to free school meals have also improved and a majority of these pupils achieve five GCSEs or equivalents, including English and mathematics, at grades A*-C; this is well above the corresponding NI average.
- An inclusive ethos permeates the school; this is evident in the very high quality of the working relationships at all levels; the mutual respect, care and appreciation of one another demonstrated by the staff and by the pupils; and the importance placed on meeting the needs of those pupils who experience barriers to learning. The nurturing and supportive approach to helping pupils overcome their barriers through a wide range of interventions has resulted in these pupils achieving high standards, the development of their personal and social skills and access to progressive career pathways. This work demonstrates very well the synergy of the school's academic and pastoral provision.

¹ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/post-primary-inspection-st-pauls-high-school-bessbrook.pdf>

² In the same free school meals band.

- The school has placed a clear focus on raising further the quality of learning and teaching including through joint practice development³. All of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective in promoting learning and most were very good. This highly effective practice was characterised by appropriate planning, the active engagement of the pupils in purposeful tasks and brisk, well-paced and challenging activities which encouraged the pupils to think critically and creatively.
- During the inspection, the inspectors engaged in discussion with groups of pupils from across the key stages. The pupils talked about the positive impact of the provision on developing their confidence, raising their aspirations and supporting their learning and achievement.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils continue to reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. The pupils reported that they feel safe, secure and very happy in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. In particular, the pupils emphasised the very positive working relationships across the school and the very high level of individual care, guidance and support provided by the staff.

Conclusion

St Paul's High School continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the pupils. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

³ Joint practice development involves school partnerships working together in clusters to bring about improvement. This work is facilitated by the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI).

Health and Safety/Accommodation

The school has raised the need for an updated security system with the relevant authorities; this work needs to proceed as a matter of urgency.

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