

Report of a Post-primary Inspection

St Patrick's & St Brigid's College

November 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Patrick's & St Brigid's College is a maintained, co-educational, non-selective, 11-16 post-primary school which is located in the village of Claudy. The school draws pupils from a wide geographical area and from approximately 15 feeder primary schools. The enrolment has declined from 535 pupils in 2022-23 to 490 pupils this year. Just over one-quarter (26%) of the pupils have been identified as having special education needs (SEN), which represents an increase from approximately one-tenth (11%) in 2022-23. Almost one-third of the pupils (33%) have free school meals entitlement.

Over the last two years, three staff have been promoted to leadership positions in a temporary capacity prior to the arrival of the new principal in September 2023. In addition, a new wellbeing lead has been appointed.

The school has significant building works planned including: classroom refurbishment; a sports hall; a third generation (3G) artificial grass pitch; drama studio; and additional car parking.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to pupils, parents and staff in advance of the inspection.

A very small number (22) of pupils responded to the online questionnaire, in which almost all reported that the school provides them with regular opportunities to exercise. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils talked about how they have developed their confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills since attending the school. They spoke about how, when they contribute well, they earn achievement points and are rewarded regularly. They conveyed their enjoyment of the practical aspects of their learning and the extra-curricular activities provided for them.

Almost all (97%) of the teachers responded to the questionnaire and their responses were extremely positive. They felt their views were sought and then used to inform decision making in the school. Around three-fifths of the teachers who responded also provided additional written comments which highlighted how they are supported well in their work and feel appreciated. Just under three-quarters (73%) of the classroom assistants and support staff responded to the questionnaires and their replies were also highly positive. In the written responses provided they report how they feel that they belong to a 'welcoming community as a whole'.

One-fifth of parents (84) responded to the questionnaire and their responses mostly indicated high levels of satisfaction with aspects of the school provision, including knowing how to report a safeguarding concern and how the school has good links with other organisations and clubs. Most of the responses from parents reported that their child is happy in school and is making good progress. One-third (28) of these parents provided additional written comments in which they expressed how there is a 'sense of unity between parents and teachers.' In almost one-fifth of these responses, the parents reported that pupil behaviour could be managed better in the school.

The small number of individual concerns expressed in the questionnaires were shared with the principal and two representatives of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside St Patrick's & St Brigid's College to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The newly agreed vision and mission statements align well to the school's values including belief, achievement and leadership.
- The priorities for the current school development plan have been identified appropriately and reflect well the school's values. The school is at an early stage in their monitoring and evaluating processes across the school.
- Planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning are mostly effective. Planning to meet more effectively the needs of all pupils and the use of more effective assessment for learning strategies by the teachers would improve further the provision for learning.
- The curriculum is well planned and is informed by the pupils' interests, abilities and ambitions, in line with the school's vision that 'all pupils can achieve'.
- The staff know the pupils well and understand how to identify and address barriers to learning at an early stage through a range of intervention programmes which meet well the needs of all of the pupils.
- The planning for the preventative curriculum is progressive and addresses contemporary issues within real-life contexts.
- The pupils benefit from a multi-disciplinary pastoral support team including a key stage (KS) 3 learning mentor, a school counsellor and a KS 4 wellbeing lead, which is impacting positively on the pupils' readiness to learn and their outcomes.

- The pupils' successes are celebrated well: in class; through engaging wall displays around the school; in assemblies; and effectively through the school's social media platform.
- The pupils would benefit from meaningful opportunities to share their views and contribute to decision-making about their learning experiences.
- The school has been strategic in its approach to the development of an enhanced community of learning, resulting in improved links with a broader range of stakeholders.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for action:

- to improve the consistency and quality of the planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning; and
- to implement more rigorous monitoring and evaluating processes across the school, including better use of the views of pupils.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Work was undertaken in the past year by the school to align the school vision to its Catholic values and the school patrons, St Patrick and St Brigid. Consequently, the staff and parents report that they are clear about the school's vision, "to support, nurture and develop young people academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually and to enable all pupils to fulfil their potential", and almost all of the staff feel they have contributed to this work.

The school is in year one of a new three-year school development cycle. The school's 2024-25 strategic priorities are appropriate, have been derived through consultation with staff and analysis of a range of information, and reflect the school's agreed values. The appropriate monitoring and evaluating processes are currently being re-established across the school and they are at an early stage of development.

The governors who met with the inspectors have a clear understanding of the school's current context and know well the life and work of the school. They spoke enthusiastically about their role in re-establishing a shared vision and expressed with passion their commitment to the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning are mostly effective. A key feature of the most effective lessons observed was how the staff developed well the pupils' skills through carefully planned, contextual, relevant and meaningful opportunities for purposeful learning. Additionally, the learning activities had been planned well to reflect the pupils needs and abilities. In the more effective lessons, the pupils engage in learning that builds on prior knowledge and engages them well in their learning. They have opportunities to take part in paired work which develops well their self-management skills and builds further their confidence. In discussions with the inspectors, pupils expressed their appreciation of the friendly, caring staff who are interested in them as individuals and support them with their work.

In the lessons where the learning was less effective, the pupils were not challenged fully and there were too few opportunities for the pupils to extend their learning through for example, appropriate use of digital technology. Consequently, the pupils disengaged from learning due to the lack of 'stretch and challenge' in the task.

Through the school's self-evaluation last year, they have identified appropriately the need to focus on the consistency and quality of the planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning. The school is planning to provide opportunities for staff professional learning, including the sharing of effective practice during this academic year.

The school has recently updated their positive behaviour policy and has prioritised the re-establishing of clear expectations of positive behaviours for learning. The wide range of intervention strategies, increased consistency in classrooms routines and the close collaboration of pastoral staff is resulting in improved pupil behaviour in the classrooms and a reduction in the number of behaviour-related incidents. The school recognises that there are low-level behavioural issues at the less structured times of the day, for example, between classes and during the current morning breaktime arrangements and have identified appropriately the need to review procedures at these times. The pastoral team has also identified the need to engage meaningfully with the pupils to inform planning and procedures for their pastoral provision.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and is informed by the learners' interests, abilities and ambitions, in line with their vision that 'all pupils can achieve'. The curriculum offer at KS 4 reflects the school's high expectations of all pupils and meets fully the requirements of the Entitlement Framework, with an appropriate range of academic and vocational subjects being delivered.

The staff use effectively quantitative data and pastoral information to inform learning pathways for the pupils. The pupils have sufficient knowledge to make well-informed choices at transition points and almost all pupils reported, during conversations with inspectors, that they were happy with the subject choices available. The KS 3 pupils talked positively about their involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as sporting, art, music and drama activities. They particularly appreciate the addition of rugby for all pupils to the extra-curricular offer.

The personal and social development of the learners is delivered through the citizenship and personal development elements of learning for life and work, complemented by input from a wide range of guest speakers and during school assemblies. The planning provides for progression in pupil knowledge, understanding and skills from year 8 to year 12 and addresses contemporary issues within real-life contexts. Responding to current issues in the locality, the pupil voice has already informed changes to the preventative curriculum for this academic year.

The provision for relationships and sexuality education (RSE) has recently been consulted upon, reviewed and is being implemented this academic year. It will be important that staff monitor this provision to ensure pupils have access to scientifically accurate and age and stage appropriate information, in order to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. The school plans to consult more fully with the pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of the preventative curriculum, including the RSE programme.

There are a range of multi-agency partnerships in place to support the pastoral, personal and academic needs of the pupils. The school participated in an 'Emotional Wellbeing Team in Schools' (EWTS) programme provided by the local health trust which the school reports has impacted positively on the wellbeing of both pupils and staff. The school states it is supported well by the Education Authority's Behaviour Support Team who work with a small number of pupils and classroom assistants.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The school creates a highly supportive culture that values the emotional health and wellbeing of the pupils and the close links with home to best support the personal journey of each pupil. The pupils benefit from a multi-disciplinary pastoral support team including a KS 3 learning mentor, a school counsellor and a KS 4 wellbeing lead. The well-embedded learning mentoring programme, complemented with the provision of wellbeing support is resulting in individualised support for pupils across all year groups, through: accessing strategies to support their learning; discussing relevant and contemporary issues; and understanding how to express their emotions. As a result of nominations and votes from parents, the school successfully achieved the '*Families First Pastoral Care and Mental Health Awards*' in 2023-24.

The process for early identification of pupils' needs in the school is effective. Through close links with the local primary schools, all pupils are supported effectively, settle quickly and develop confidence in their new school routines on starting year 8.

There is close collaboration between the SEN staff and the subject teachers to provide a bespoke and flexible curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils across the key stages. For example, the curriculum is adjusted for pupils with SEN, helping to lower anxiety, and providing support sessions on life skills, portfolio work, applications to further education courses and support with particular subjects when required. The staff know the pupils well and are addressing the pupils' barriers to learning at an early stage.

The pupils in KS 4 benefit from the welcoming, safe and accessible wellbeing hub. They attend small group work or one-to one counselling sessions for a wide range of issues including anxiety, self-esteem, anger management, exam related stress and support with developing effective coping strategies. Over two-thirds of pupils that received support from the well-being hub in 2023/24 have demonstrated measurable improvements in their mental health and wellbeing. The pupils can also access a drop-in service for support, and a mindful space is available every morning and lunchtime. In addition, a KS 4 well-being enrichment curriculum is planned and at an early stage of development; this includes, for example support programmes for the development of pupils' resilience and study skills.

The pupils' individual education plans are of a high quality and include comprehensive targets. Over the last three years, most pupils with a statement of SEN have progressed appropriately to a range of level three apprenticeships at the local further education college.

The school is focusing on their monitoring and evaluation processes for pupil attendance, as the school's attendance figure was 88.7% for 2023-24. These processes include: the regular monitoring of data; half termly meetings with the Education Welfare Officer; and the regular celebration of pupils' attendance in school.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The school evaluates effectively the progress of all of the pupils through a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data obtained from a variety of academic and pastoral sources. Whole school and individual pupil targets are set, monitored and evaluated across the curriculum areas. Pupil progress is monitored against targets set following each of the four assessment points during the academic year, and interventions are put in place when needed. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils reported that they like the target-setting process and that it helps them to improve on their work, particularly, in those subjects that give them meaningful feedback following their homework and assessments. The school has identified that teacher feedback is an area to develop further to ensure assessment for learning is impacting positively on the pupils' progress consistently across the school. Consequently, the homework policy was updated, and going forward, the revised homework policy needs to be consistently implemented and embedded across all year groups.

The school's data shows that almost all (96%) pupils attain five GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C and a majority (53%) attain five GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, which is mainly in line with the school's expectations and the pupils' abilities. The school has identified appropriately that girls are not attaining in line with expectation in a small number of subjects and have planned interventions going forward to address this.

The year 12 pupils have good opportunities to attend careers talks with a range of post-primary schools and the further education college. Additionally, an advisor from the Careers Service Northern Ireland provides all year 12 pupils with a face-to-face interview in the school. They are informed of the progression options to sixth form

as well as the broad range of occupational pathways available in further education and work-based learning. Almost all of the year 12 pupils progressed to further education, training or employment over the last three years. In discussions with the pupils at KS 4, they talked of how they would benefit from further opportunities to engage in work-related experiences.

The pupils develop well as individuals and succeed, including through participation in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting, cultural and academic areas which they value. The school's social media platform is used effectively to share the achievements of sporting events and the wider successes of both the pupils and staff. In addition, a new house system is planned to facilitate collegiality, provide further opportunities to celebrate success and embed further the Christian values of the school. A significant number of events throughout the year are organised for the pupils to support others, mainly through fund-raising for charitable causes.

The pupils during discussions with inspectors reported that they appreciate their successes being celebrated by the school, for example, in classroom wall displays, being presented with certificates and being highlighted on the school's social media platform.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The school is developing and growing well its community of learning through improved links with a broader range of stakeholders. Groups of year 7 pupils from local primary schools have had opportunities to attend and participate in a range of activities in St Patrick's and St Brigid's College. The pupils from years 8 and 9, who spoke to inspectors, particularly valued the opportunity to develop new friendships prior to, and in the transition from, their primary school. Community links were also reported in the online questionnaire by all teachers as having a positive impact on the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.

Meaningful experiences in learning are provided through, for example, attendance at the Youth Assembly in Stormont and an engineering and advanced manufacturing careers education, information, advice and guidance event for pupils in years 10, 11 and 12. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils report that the effective collaboration with an Invest Northern Ireland-funded industry led network, Generating Engineering & Manufacturing Excellence in the North West (GEMX) which allowed them to participate and engage in a range of interactive experiences, gain insights into industry and importantly improve their knowledge of progression pathways and potential career choices into engineering.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. The pupils who spoke to inspectors know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

4. GOING FORWARD

St Patrick's & St Brigid's College's vision is supporting well the school in nurturing and developing young people academically, spiritually, socially and emotionally. The curriculum is well planned and is informed by the learners' interests, abilities and ambitions in line with the school's vision that 'all pupils can achieve'.

The ETI, through the engagement of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the areas for action as set out in the report.

5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

APPENDIX 2: SMALL SCHOOLS

In all post-primary schools where the enrolment number is below the minimum number of 500 in years 8 to 12, as set out in the Department of Education's [Sustainable Schools Policy](#), it will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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